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FAIR IN THE FEARLESS OLD FASHION.

A Novel.

By CHARLES FARMLET.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



London :

SAMUEL TINSLEY,
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FAIR IN THE FEARLESS OLD FASHION.

CHAPTER I.

HATCHING THE PLOT.

Price of many a crime untold,
Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!

THOMAS HOOD.

THE prospect of a profitable piece of business, occurring at such an extremely opportune moment, had quite restored the Baron to his wonted cordiality and good humour.

“Sit down, Emperor, and make yourself at home,” he said, as they entered the small, neatly-furnished drawing-room.

The invitation was wholly superfluous, for Julius had already flung himself at full-length

on the sofa, and was helping himself freely to curaçoa from a liqueur case which stood on a small *guéridon* close to his elbow. After thrice filling and draining his glass, he drew a cheroot from his cigar-case, which he lighted with much deliberation, and, leaning luxuriously back on the cushions, began to smoke complacently.

"Nice little place, this," he remarked, glancing round the room with an approving air.

"Pretty well," replied Ravoli, seating himself in an arm-chair.

"What rent do you pay?"

"What the deuce can it matter to you what I pay?" answered the Baron, rather impatiently. "If you have got anything to say worth listening to, why can't you say it at once, instead of losing time in idiotic questions?"

"*Parbleu, mon cher*, you were not in such a hurry to listen to what I had to say when I

met you just now on the Place Masséna," answered the Emperor, with an ironical laugh.

"Don't be an infernal fool, Emperor," retorted Ravoli, roughly. "If you had met me unexpectedly in Paris, and had fancied that I wanted to borrow money of you when you were hard-up yourself, would you have been overjoyed to see me? *Non, n'est-ce pas?* Then don't waste your breath in talking nonsense; but, if there is any business to be done by which money can be made, and in which you require my help, just speak out plainly, without beating about the bush. Of course I know well enough that you cannot do without my assistance, or you would not be such an ass as to lessen your own profits by handing a portion of them over to me."

"Now, that is what I call plain, solid, good sense," exclaimed Julius Cæsar, with a touch of sincere admiration in his voice. "We Yankees are generally supposed to be tolerably practical people, but, by Jove,

you can give us points and beat us hollow ! I might have told you that I wanted to put you into a good thing just for old acquaintance's sake, but I see that that sort of humbug wouldn't go down with you. Business is business, and sentiment be darned ! Now, just keep your ears open." And, without mentioning any names, the adventurer proceeded to give his companion a brief account of the commission with which he had been entrusted by Mrs. Barclay, reducing, however, the amount of the reward offered to twenty thousand francs, of which he generously offered Ravoli five thousand as his share.

The Italian had listened quietly to the few first words ; but, before Julius Cæsar had proceeded far, a quickly suppressed start of surprise and a gleam of truly diabolical satisfaction, which shot from his sinister, black eyes, betrayed the intensity of his interest in the narrative. As the

Emperor concluded his story, he rose from his chair, and, taking up his position, in true British style, on the hearthrug, looked steadily at the speaker.

“Have you quite finished?” he inquired.

“Quite. That is to say, I have still to tell you the names of the parties concerned; but we can postpone that until you have quite made up your mind about accepting my terms.”

“I accept them, with a modification,” answered Ravoli, unhesitatingly. “As for giving me the names, you may spare yourself that trouble. I can dot the I’s and cross the T’s of your tale myself, besides rectifying a slight mistake into which you have fallen concerning the amount of the reward.”

The Emperor’s face fell visibly. He took his cigar from his mouth, and stared at Ravoli with surprise and annoyance depicted on his countenance. The Baron proceeded in a quiet and confident tone,—

“To begin with, I will fill up the blanks which you have left in your narrative. The lady (for it is a lady) who employs you is Mrs. Barclay, the widow of your rich uncle, of whom you several times have spoken to me. The man against whom the attack is to be directed is Captain Lascelles, an English officer, now staying at the Grand Hôtel in this very town.”

The Emperor swore a surly oath, and moved uneasily on the sofa.

“What is the meaning of all this?” he muttered, angrily. “She had no idea of employing you when she spoke to me; and there has been no time for you to hear from her since then, unless she has telegraphed to you.”

The Italian smiled with calm superiority.

“Mrs. Barclay has neither spoken, nor written, nor telegraphed to me one single word having the remotest reference to the present affair; but I happen to have been here all the winter, and I am, I presume, at

liberty to draw my own deductions from what I see passing before my very eyes? And now for the promised rectification. From what I know of Mrs. Barclay's prodigal disposition and boundless wealth, I feel perfectly convinced that she never offered you such a beggarly reward as twenty thousand francs. How much you are to receive I do not care to know, but I warn you that I will not move one single step for less than ten thousand francs."

For fully two minutes Julius Cæsar remained silent, but his active brain was working busily. With an eagle glance, worthy of his great namesake, he at once perceived the advantage of making what the French so expressively term *la part du feu*, and of securing the Baron's invaluable co-operation by giving up the ten thousand francs demanded, which he, moreover, confidently reckoned on being able to charge to Mrs. Barclay; while, even at the worst, that sum

would be but a mere trifle subtracted from the magnificent reward to which he would, in case of success, be entitled.

"Well done, old fellow!" he said, at length, coolly striking a fusee to re-light his cigar, which, in his first surprise, he had allowed to go out. "I see clearly that I am no match for you at this game. The names are perfectly correct, and you shall have the ten thousand francs if we succeed."

"We *shall* succeed," replied Ravoli, with a determined look on his swarthy features. "I do not mind telling you that I am quite as deeply and as directly interested in our success as your employer herself can be. In fact, I should not mind giving my services for nothing if I did not require ready cash to carry out my ulterior plans."

"Wheels within wheels," answered the American, philosophically. "Well, I don't want to know anything about your secrets. As long as you row in the same boat with us,

and are ready to pull a strong oar, that is all I want. And now, have you any plan yet?"

"Certainly not. Do you expect me to weave the net which will be required to catch and hold such a fly as that in half a minute?"

"Not even an idea?"

"Well, yes; I have a sort of undefined idea, but it is not worth while talking of it until I have worked it out further. The best thing that you can do is to leave the matter, for the present, entirely in my hands. As luck will have it, I am engaged to dine at the Café Anglais with Captain Lascelles and his inseparable friend, Major Douglas—an awkward-looking customer, by-the-bye. I will take advantage of the opportunity to see whether I can spy out any point of attack, and will then return here to talk the matter over with you. In the mean time keep close, and do not show yourself out of the house. My servant will see about getting you your luncheon and dinner here."

The dinner at the Café Anglais was given by Lascelles and Douglas to the Baron and to Colonel Macdonald, an old brother officer, who was on his way to India, and who had taken advantage of a delay in the sailing of the steamer from Marseilles to pay a flying visit to his friends at Nice. The Colonel had served for many years with Douglas, but had been transferred to another regiment on promotion soon after Lascelles had joined, and was, therefore, far more intimate with the former. During the first part of the dinner, the conversation was general, but towards the fifth bottle of wine the two brothers-in-arms, as Anglo-Indians are wont to do, struck a vein of mutual reminiscences about a great number of places generally ending in "*ghur*" or "*bad*," in which Walter and the Baron were, of course, unable to follow them; and the two younger men thus found themselves practically *en tête-à-tête*. Overjoyed at the prospect of his approach-

ing connubial bliss, and slightly flushed by a few extra glasses of champagne which he had drained in response to the jolly old Colonel's frequent challenges, Lascelles was in the very mood for unreserved confidence, and his companion exerted all his skill to draw him out. In a very short time the Baron was in full possession of all the arrangements made that morning at the villa, and had even listened to some passages from Doctor Gaveston's letter, which Walter, after reading it, replaced in his outer breast-pocket.

The Italian followed, with the closest attention, Lascelles's account of their intended movements.

"So you are going to *faire Charlemagne*," he said, laughing. "Well, I must say that I admire your prudence."

Lascelles spoke French remarkably well, but he was not familiar with the slang of the gambling-table.

"I do not understand your expression," he replied. "What does *faire Charlemagne* mean?"

"I am not acquainted with the exact etymology of the term," answered Ravoli; "but it is a common slang phrase for a very discreet and desirable operation, which I sincerely wish I had myself performed rather oftener. It means," he continued, closely watching the effect of his words on the other's face, "quietly going off with the money that one has won at play, without stupidly running the risk of losing it back again."

Walter started at the artful insinuation.

"By Jove, Baron!" he exclaimed, "I thank you for reminding me of that. The money that I won at the tables at Monte Carlo I have no scruples about; but, of course, I am bound to give De Clère and the others a chance of revenge. What a fool I must be never to have thought of it myself!"

"*Mille tonnerres!*" cried the Italian, with

well-acted vexation, "how sorry I am that I ever mentioned the matter at all! I would never have said a single word on the subject if I had had any idea that you would look at it in that light. You cannot expect to find such a run of luck again, and it is ten to one that you will simply lose back all your winnings. Take my advice, and stick to the money. It was fairly won, and if you choose to keep it, instead of running any further risk, nobody in the world can have a word to say against it."

But Lascelles, as the Baron had anticipated, was immovable in his resolution. It should never be said of him that he had left Nice, or, as he more energetically put it, that he had "sneaked off," with a large sum of money, without giving the losers a fair chance of recovering their losses. The Colonel and Kenneth, to whom he appealed, confirmed him in his decision; for although Douglas held gambling in utter detestation,

yet he fully appreciated and approved of the chivalrous feeling which prompted Walter's present determination, a feeling in which the mere love of play had no part, but which simply arose from a strict, perhaps an over-strict, sense of delicacy and honour. Finally, it was settled that Lascelles should invite his late adversaries to dine with him at Monte Carlo, where the Hôtel de Paris is celebrated for its luxurious dinners, on the next evening but one, and should hold after the dinner an écarté bank of seven thousand pounds. If he lost, he would, at any rate, be no worse off than before; while, if Fortune again proved favourable, he could retire from the field with a clear conscience. In either case, his opponents could have no grounds for complaint, and the accusation of having "*fait Charlemagne*" could never be brought against him.

In the face of this unanimous verdict, Ravoli at last, though with much apparent

reluctance, withdrew his opposition, and even consented, at Walter's request, to issue the invitations, and to make all the necessary arrangements for the dinner. The party soon afterwards broke up. As they were putting on their great-coats, Ravoli made some remark concerning the exquisite perfume of a bunch of violets which Lascelles wore in his button-hole. He leant forward to inhale their fragrance, and, as he did so, his hand for a moment touched Walter's chest.

That same evening Walter, when emptying his pockets before taking off his coat, missed Dr. Gaveston's letter. He hunted for it in vain in all his pockets, in his portemonnaie, and even in his cigar-case. The letter was not to be found. Then it suddenly struck him that he must have pulled it out of his pocket with his handkerchief, and thus lost it, and he dismissed the whole affair from his thoughts as a matter of no importance.

On leaving the *café*, the Baron had hastened to join his accomplice, whom he found lying on the sofa in the drawing-room and smoking, with a couple of empty liqueur flasks on the table by his side.

The Emperor raised his head eagerly as the Italian entered the room.

“ Well, what news ? ”

“ Good,” replied Ravoli, briefly.

“ When is it to come off ? ”

“ The day after to-morrow.”

“ What is the plan ? ”

“ I have not had time to work out the details yet,” answered Ravoli, seating himself at the round table in the middle of the room, and drawing from his pocket a letter which bore a most suspicious resemblance to Dr. Gaveston’s epistle. “ The plot is only roughly sketched out in my mind ; but two heads are better than one, so we will work at putting it into shape together, unless you are too drunk to talk about business.”

But Julius Cæsar possessed a well-seasoned brain. His face was flushed and his hand unsteady, but his intellect was unclouded, and he was quite sober enough to follow, in all its tortuous windings, the plot which had been hatched in Ravoli's ready brain. For many hours the two worthies sat in deep consultation. At last the plan of action was settled. The Baron, on his way from the *café*, had called at the telegraph-office for some blank forms for despatches. One of these he now proceeded to fill in with a blue pencil, such as is used in France by telegraph-clerks. A search among the heap of notes which lay in a card-basket soon brought to light a few lines from Miss Warburton—an invitation to dinner written in her aunt's name; and, taking this note as a model, he proceeded to indite a letter, in which he imitated Clara's handwriting with all the caligraphic skill of a professional forger. But it was long ere his fastidious eye was

satisfied, and he tore up at least a dozen sheets of paper before he could please himself.

"Do you think that will do, Emperor?" he said, at last, handing his final production to Julius Cæsar.

The American scrutinized the letter narrowly.

"*I* should see at once that it was only a bit of flash," he replied, after minutely comparing the Baron's production with the original; "but I think it will do well enough for *him*. He will have no suspicions; and I fancy that his state of mind, when he receives it, will scarcely be such as to allow of any very careful examination of the handwriting."

"Then it is all settled," answered Ravoli, locking the various documents up in his desk. "I shall ride out to Monte Carlo, and speak to Alphonse to-morrow morning. He is one of our own set, and I can depend upon him. You have only to keep yourself

dark until the time comes for you to play your part in the piece, and within forty-eight hours we shall be able to telegraph to Mrs. Barclay, '*L'affaire est faite!*' "

* * * * *

Although the consultation of the two conspirators had been prolonged far into the small hours, the indefatigable Baron was up early, and ordered his horse to be brought to the door at half-past nine punctually. Julius Cæsar had perfect confidence in his accomplice, whose interests were now doubly bound up with his own ; and, bowing to the intellectual superiority of the bolder and more accomplished villain, was well contented to do his bidding passively. He, therefore, readily handed to Ravoli the two thousand francs which the latter considered necessary to purchase the assistance of the individual alluded to by the name of Alphonse. Thus provided with the sinews of war, the Baron set forth on his ride to Monte Carlo.

Who does not know the familiar figure of the head-waiter of a crack hotel at a fashionable gambling - place? Who, when it has once been given to him to bask for a single day in the rays of his gorgeous presence, could ever forget that majestic and imposing mortal, with his splendidly-embroidered shirt-front, his glossy and irreproachably-fitting dress-suit, and the lustrous and sparkling brilliant on the fourth finger of his left hand? A celebrated statesman, the Swede Oxenstiern, is said to have once exclaimed, "Behold, how little wisdom is required to govern a country!" If his remark have, indeed, any foundation in fact, the profession of a *premier garçon* must, from an intellectual point of view, be ranked far higher than that of a *premier ministre*.

A Mezzofanti in languages, a Brillat-Savarin in taste, a Talleyrand in diplomacy, he must combine a hundred different talents, for he has a hundred different parts to play. From

composing the *menu* of a *petit souper* to re-adjusting the little differences between Monsieur le Vicomte de la Gomme and Mademoiselle Pattenlair, who has quarrelled with her protector, and has hastened to pour the tale of her sorrows and wrongs into the friendly head-waiter's plaited cambric bosom,—from placing young Spooney of the Rifle Brigade next to that pretty American girl whom he has been ogling for the last week at the *table-d'hôte*, to raising a loan of a few thousand francs for that unwary young warrior when the red-and-black dragon, whose cave is in the casino, has swallowed up his last five-pound note,—he is ready and willing to undertake (for a consideration) any task, however arduous, any negotiation, however difficult and delicate; and it is rare indeed that an affair confided to his dexterous and experienced hands is not speedily and satisfactorily, though, perhaps, rather expensively, settled.

In the science of physiognomy he is a very Lavater. At a single glance he gauges the squeezeability of each new arrival. As the hotel omnibus discharges its living freight at the door, the words of command drop from his lips, and forthwith the *petit-crevé*, who is busily engaged in devouring the few thousands which he has inherited from some maiden aunt, aided and abetted therein by a skinny *figurante* from a third-rate boulevard theatre, is smilingly bowed into a suite of apartments on the first floor, which will be charged for in the bill at the rate of about a guinea an hour; while the tweed-arrayed British tourist, who is doing the Continent on the cheap, and whose proudest boast, when he returns to his native land, will be that his whole tour only cost him 23*l.* 17*s.* 6*d.*,—including, as the great Mr. Cook would say, “all fees, gratuities, and incidental expenses,”—is ruthlessly consigned to a six-franc den, *au cinquième*, which he

will leave in disgust on the following day—this being, indeed, the very result aimed at. Cheap tourists are not looked upon as desirable acquisitions in crack, gambling-place hotels.

Poeta, we are told, *nascitur, non fit*; and the same remark may, with a great deal of truth, be applied to this peculiar genus of head-waiters. A lawyer by *profession*, a clergyman by *conviction*, or a tailor by *trade*, may thrive and prosper, even as Messrs. Kenealy, Spurgeon, and Poole have prospered and thriven; but a head-waiter cannot hope to attain the full perfection of development of which the species is capable, unless he be, so to speak, a head-waiter by *birth*. As a consequence of this singular and little-known fact in natural history, a striking likeness, both in outward appearance and in moral and intellectual idiosyncrasies, pervades the whole race; and the above slight sketch, though originally only intended to

portray the general characteristics of the genus, may be accepted as a tolerably accurate likeness of Monsieur Alphonse, *premier garçon* at the Grand Hôtel de Paris at Monte Carlo, who, at about eleven o'clock A.M., was lounging on the marble steps of that splendid caravansary, intent on daintily arranging his ambrosial whiskers with a tortoiseshell comb, by the aid of a pocket-mirror.

“*Ah ! Voilà Monsieur le Baron !*” he muttered, as Ravoli, mounted on the Corsaire, turned the corner at a sharp trot, and reined up his horse at the door of the hotel. “I wonder when he will find it convenient to return me those fifty Napoleons that I was fool enough to lend him ?”

Ravoli dismounted quickly, and threw the reins to one of the *gamins* who pressed forward to hold his horse.

“I wish to speak to you for a few minutes

on business," he said, laying a peculiar stress on the two last words.

The gorgeous head-waiter nodded, and led the way to a small private sanctum, behind the secretary's office, which was his own special audience-chamber.

"Now, Alphonse," said the Baron, taking a chair; "*les bons comptes font les bons amis*, so let us square our little accounts. I owe you fifty Napoleons. Here they are; and here are ten more for the accommodation."

Alphonse's face, hitherto majestic and somewhat forbidding, underwent a magical change. He protested volubly, and with many affable smiles, that he had no immediate use for the money, and that Ravoli could repay it at any future period.

"Meanwhile you have pocketed the notes," replied Ravoli, smiling. "Quite right, *mon cher*; take your money when you can get it, and don't try to palm off any of your

humbug on *me*. Now the question is, do you want to earn another five hundred?"

"In what way?" inquired Alphonse, warily.

"You have charge of the cards sold in the hotel?" continued the Italian, without directly answering this question.

"I have."

"Is not each pack sealed with the manager's own seal?"

"It is."

"Is a written account kept of the number of packs in stock each day?"

"No. I receive fifty packs at a time from the manager, for which I pay him a hundred francs; and I retail them to the *voyageurs* who ask for them at four francs a pack. That is one of my perquisites. But I keep no written accounts."

"Then I will give you five hundred francs," said Ravoli, "to let me have one of those packs in my hands for ten minutes,

and to do what I tell you with it to-morrow evening."

"For a swindle?" asked Alphonse, calmly. "No use! That sort of thing has a nasty knack of getting blown upon, and I run too much risk."

"We *intend* the thing to be blown upon," replied Ravoli, eagerly; "but you shall not run the slightest risk. As our plan is arranged, you will not incur the smallest suspicion."

But Alphonse was unconvinced and obdurate; and, much against his will, the Baron was obliged to reveal the whole plot to him before he could overcome his resistance. After much conversation, the bargain was finally concluded for a thousand francs, half of which sum was to be paid immediately, and the remainder after success.

The first moiety having been duly paid, Alphonse took from a small safe a pack of cards, wrapped in blue paper, and sealed up with a particular seal, which never left the

hands of the manager. The Italian produced from his pocket a small lump of some white substance, closely resembling plaster-of-Paris, and proceeded to take an impression of this seal. Then, by holding the blade of a knife, strongly heated in the flame of a candle, over the wax, he softened it sufficiently to enable him to open the paper; all these various operations being performed with an amount of precision and dexterity highly suggestive of much previous practice. The cards were then submitted to some mysterious process with the point of a sharp needle. The inverse operations were now effected. The wax was again softened, the cards replaced in the paper, and re-sealed, and the pack was handed to Alphonse, who re-locked it in the safe. Then, after a few more directions to the head-waiter, and some orders concerning the dinner for the following evening, Ravoli re-mounted his horse, and rode back to Nice.

CHAPTER II.

IL MAL' OCCHIO.

It was clear he lay under a curse.

INGOLDSBY LEGENDS.

THE dinner at the Hôtel de Paris had been a great success. Walter's successful match with De Clère at the Cercle Masséna had taken place early in the evening, before the regular disreputable gambling set had put in an appearance, and thus the present party, consisting entirely of his late opponents, was free from any such unpleasant admixture. Besides Ravoli and Douglas (who must both be excepted from the above statement as having taken no part in the game), there were present M. de Clère, two French journalists, three American naval officers, and a

young Sicilian. Lascelles, the host of the evening, although he had won money from nearly every man present, was extremely popular, and, being in high spirits, exerted himself most successfully to promote the hilarity of the meeting. The cook, incited to superhuman efforts by a "tip" of five Napoleons, had surpassed himself; a certain *salmi de bécasses* being, in particular, voted absolutely perfect. The cellars of the hotel had disgorged for the occasion their choicest treasures of the sparkling vintage of Cliquot, of the world-renowned brands of Léoville and Château Margaux, of slim, tapering bottles from Johannisberg's sunny hills, and of those fat, short-necked flasks of Steinwein, so dear to the practised *gourmet*. Under the influence of these manifold incentives to good-fellowship and cheerfulness, most of the assembled guests began gradually to throw off "that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere"; and, before the dessert had

given way to coffee and cigars, their spirits had risen almost beyond the point which it is desirable to reach when high play is to be the order of the night. M. de Clère and Kenneth alone drank sparingly, and preserved their *sang-froid* unimpaired.

An accident which had occurred that afternoon in the harbour of Villafranca to a pleasure-boat having turned the conversation to the dangers of the sea, Lascelles was relating an incident which had happened to him during his last voyage to India, when he had narrowly escaped being drowned by the upsetting of a small boat in the Straits of Babel-Mandeb.

"By-the-bye, Mariani," he said, addressing the young Sicilian already mentioned, "there was a countryman of yours present, a very handsome man, who was the only person saved besides myself. He was my fellow-traveller as far as Bombay, and we became tolerably friendly, but I lost sight

of him there, and have never met him again. I think his name was Gabrelli, or Grabella."

"The Marchese di Gabrella!" exclaimed Onofrio Mariani. "Then I only wonder that you were saved at all. Why, he has the *mal'occhio*!"

"The *mal'occhio*! What on earth is that?" asked one of the American officers.

"The evil eye!" answered the Sicilian, in a tragical tone.

A shout of laughter greeted this singular announcement, which sounded doubly ludicrous in the mouth of such a confirmed *viveur* and dare-devil as Mariani was well known to be.

"Ah! you may laugh if you like, Messieurs," continued the Sicilian, gravely; "but I can assure you that *I*, who have earned, perhaps, some small reputation for being the reverse of pusillanimous, would rather storm a battery single-handed than

sail in the same ship with the Marchese di Gabrella."

Mariani's desperate bravery was proverbial. At the age of sixteen he had joined Garibaldi's famous expedition, and had distinguished himself by his reckless courage at the battle of Volturno. But his cheek had turned pale at the mention of Gabrella's name.

"What is there so terrible about him, after all?" asked Lascelles, rather impressed by the solemnity of Mariani's tone. "He only struck me as being a very quiet and gentleman-like man."

"He is all that you say, Captain Lascelles. He is a brave and accomplished gentleman, and a man of the highest honour. But a mysterious fate has cursed him with the possession of the evil eye—the *mal' occhio*, as we call it; and he passes like a baleful vision through the lives of other men, strewing death and dishonour on his path.

Never has the child been known to thrive whose brow Gabrella has kissed; never did the house prosper the threshold of which his foot has passed. Noble, talented, and wealthy, he lived for years at Palermo the life of a social outcast, and at last left Sicily, never to return again to the land of his birth. Did I not fear to cast a gloom over the gaiety of the evening," he continued, warming to his subject, "I could relate to you a fearful catastrophe which was wrought some years ago by his fatal influence, and which finally established his terrible reputation."

When, among bearded sages or eager schoolboys, among sentimental bread-and-butter misses or sedate and stiffly-starched old maids, was not a tale of horror, particularly if dashed with a touch of the supernatural, welcomed with a strange kind of half-incredulous, half-awestruck delight? In a moment every voice was raised to

beg Mariani to proceed with his tale ; and one of the French journalists, ever watchful for a *sujet de feuilleton*, drew forth his note-book and sharpened his pencil with a table-knife.

Mariani lighted a fresh cigar, and began his narrative in the following words :—

“ You must know, Messieurs, that the Marchese di Gabrella, the bearer of one of the proudest names and the possessor of one of the largest fortunes in Sicily, is now a man of about forty-five years of age. The evil influence which he was destined to exercise on all those around him manifested itself at his very birth, which cost his mother, the most beautiful woman in Palermo, her life. During the whole of his infancy and childhood this same strange fatality continued to reveal its existence. Two nurses, hired to replace the dead mother, sickened and died successively. Such was the dread excited in the province by this

series of disasters, that it became impossible to procure another substitute, and the child was suckled by a goat belonging to a neighbouring farmer. At nine years old he was sent to school at Messina. Hardly had he been there three weeks, when an epidemic fever broke out among the pupils. Popular opinion ascribed this misfortune to Gabrella's presence; and, in order to avoid absolute ruin by the loss of all his pupils, whom their parents threatened to withdraw, the principal of the college was obliged to request the old Marchese to remove his son. From this date young Gabrella was brought up for three years at home, in the strictest seclusion, and then sent to Paris, where he remained until he had completed his studies.

“His father, who had married late in life, was now long past sixty. He was extremely desirous of seeing his only son and heir married before he died, and had long ago projected a matrimonial alliance between

young Cæsare and Marietta Castagni, the daughter of one of his oldest and most valued friends. The Count Castagni was an *esprit fort*, an utter disbeliever in the *mal' occhio*, and had willingly given his assent to a plan which insured a most brilliant position, from a worldly point of view, to his fair but portionless child. Many of you are doubtless aware, Messieurs, that marriage is generally looked upon in Italy as a mere family arrangement, in which the inclinations of the bride are but rarely consulted. Thus it came to pass that as soon as Cæsare, now in his twentieth year, had been introduced to Marietta, and, struck by her great beauty, had expressed his willingness to redeem his father's promise, the matter was regarded by the two families as absolutely settled, and an early date was fixed for the celebration of their wedding.

“Marietta had not been brought up in the strict retirement of a convent, as is usually

the custom with Italian girls of noble birth. Left motherless, at an early age, to the care of a rather negligent father, she had enjoyed a large share of liberty, and had freely mixed in such social gaieties as Palermo can afford. At a ball given during the season which had preceded her betrothal to Cæsare, she had met a young officer named Luigi Paolo, who was serving in the same regiment with her two brothers, Francesco and Giovanni. This penniless and plebeian lieutenant had presumed to fall in love with the high-born daughter of the Count, and had actually pushed his audacity so far as to ask for her hand. The proposal had been repelled with scornful indignation by the Count and his two sons ; and, in spite of Marietta's tears and entreaties, Luigi had been sternly requested never to enter the Palazzo Castagni again. It was, indeed, with a view to securing her against any enterprise on the part of this young officer, that an early date had,

at the Count's own request, been assigned for her marriage to Cæsare di Gabrella.

“ Deeply enamoured of his beautiful bride, Cæsare failed to notice her singular coldness towards him, or only attributed it to maidenly modesty and reserve. He was lavishly supplied with money by his father, and scarcely a day passed on which he did not lay some costly present at her feet. He was never tired of inventing some new way of showing his devotion to her; and his romantic turn of mind unfortunately suggested to him an expedient which, innocent in itself, was fated to lead to the most frightful consequences.

“ The old Palazzo of the Castagni family stands in a large, park-like garden, about a mile from the gates of Palermo. A great part of the building, with the exception of the wing occupied by the family, had fallen into ruin with the decaying fortunes of the now impoverished house of Castagni; and

the high wall which surrounded the grounds was in many places breached and broken down. The window of Marietta's room, on the first floor, opened on to a broad balcony or terrace, which, as is usual in Sicilian houses, ran along the entire frontage of the Palazzo. Every night Cæsare rode out from Palermo to the wall of the park, and, after tying his horse's bridle to a tree which grew near a large gap, entered the grounds. Then, cautiously approaching the house under the cover of the thick shrubbery, he scaled the terrace, and placed a bouquet of white roses outside his beloved Marietta's window. Having performed this act of sentimental and romantic homage, he retraced his steps by the same way, and rode back to Palermo, his heart beating high with love and joyful anticipations.

“The wedding-day was at hand. In spite of some ominous head-shaking and whispered forebodings of misfortune from those who re-

membered the disasters which had attended Cæsare's birth and early life, no coming calamity had as yet cast its shadow before it. The bride, indeed, was sad and tearful ; but she did not dare openly to resist her father's stern commands, and the sacrifice of a girl's affections to motives of expediency is too common an event in Italy to excite much comment. Francesco and Giovanni had, of course, obtained leave from the Colonel of their regiment in order to be present at their sister's marriage, and they arrived at the Palazzo two days before the date fixed for the ceremony.

“On the night of their arrival, the two young officers were smoking at the window of their room after the remainder of the family had retired to rest. The apartment which they occupied was on the second floor, immediately above their sister's chamber. Suddenly, as they sat silently enjoying their cigarettes in the cool night air, a simul-

taneous cry of surprise and fury burst from their lips. A man, whose features were not discernible in the dim starlight, had quickly crossed the terrace, coming apparently from the direction of Marietta's window. He rapidly scaled the balustrade, leaped lightly down on the grass-plot below, and instantly plunged into the thickest part of the shrubbery. To rush down into the garden in hot pursuit of the mysterious stranger was the work of a moment; but they were too late. As they emerged from the other side of the shrubbery, they caught one brief glimpse of a light, active figure, climbing over a gap in the outer wall about a hundred paces from where they stood; and in a few seconds the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping along the road to Palermo told them plainly that their enemy was far beyond the reach of their vengeance.

"Giovanni, the younger and more hot-headed of the two brothers, was frantic with

rage. He proposed that they should at once enter Marietta's room, and force her, at the dagger's point, to reveal the name of her lover; but Francesco's calmer counsels prevailed. He felt quite convinced that the offender could be none other than Luigi Paolo, who had quitted the regiment a few days after his refusal by the family, and had not been heard of since. If so, it was more than probable that he and Marietta, whose affection for him the brothers well knew, had formed the project of eloping on the following night, the eve of the marriage. To frustrate this plan, and, at the same time, to save the honour of the family from an open scandal, must now be the object of all their efforts. After a long consultation, they at last agreed on what they considered the best mode of action.

“On the following evening Francesco announced that he should ride into Palermo, and return early the next morning to be

present at the ceremony, which was to be celebrated in the family chapel. Accordingly he left the Palazzo after dinner on horseback, but only rode to a village about half-a-mile distant from the town, and, after putting up his horse at an inn, made his way back on foot to the park wall, and there stationed himself among some bushes near the gap through which he and his brother had, on the previous night, seen the mysterious stranger disappear.

“Giovanni, who remained in the Palazzo, had provided himself during the day with a rope ladder, and, as soon as all the lights had disappeared from the various windows, he let himself noiselessly down from his room on to the terrace, and concealed himself, stiletto in hand, behind a large stone buttress close to his sister's window. It had been agreed that if Luigi made his appearance, Francesco should quietly follow him to the terrace. There the two brothers would fall

on him simultaneously and despatch him with their daggers,—a summary mode of getting rid of a troublesome suitor, which may appear to you somewhat unjustifiable, but which, in Sicily, is looked upon as the most natural thing in the world. The corpse was then to be carried out of the grounds and flung on the road, where its discovery on the morrow would simply be attributed to one of those nocturnal assassinations so common in the neighbourhood of Palermo.

“ There was no moon, and the stars shed but a dim and uncertain light. Francesco had taken his post early, and for many hours he waited in vain. At last, just as the western breeze bore faintly to his ears the stroke of midnight from the tower of the cathedral of Palermo, he started and clutched the hilt of his stiletto. A horseman was rapidly approaching the wall at full gallop. He reined up his steed near the

gap, and was about to dismount, when Francesco, anxious to see his features, incautiously moved a step nearer. In doing so he trod on a dry stick, which broke under his foot with a loud snap. Cæsare heard the unusual sound, and, naturally unwilling to be detected in his amorous expedition, instantly struck the spurs into his horse's flanks, and, before Francesco could raise the pistol which he had drawn from his belt, was again lost to sight in the darkness.

“Bitterly cursing his own imprudence, which had rendered the whole enterprise abortive, Francesco wended his way slowly back to the Palazzo. His first intention had been to go straight up to his room and thence call his brother from the window ; but, as he approached the door, he suddenly remembered that at such an hour it would certainly be locked. The only way by which he could effect his entrance was, therefore, by scaling the terrace, whence he and his brother could

easily regain their apartment by means of the rope ladder.

“Giovanni, foaming with rage and impatience, had been waiting for more than two hours in his hiding-place, when a slight rustle became audible among the bushes below. In another moment the form of a man was seen escalading the balustrade, and the tread of a spurred heel resounded on the stone terrace. Maddened and blinded with fury at the sight of his supposed enemy, whose features the night was too dark to allow him to distinguish, the fiery young man rushed forward. Swift as lightning he raised his arm and twice plunged his stiletto into the intruder's breast. With a single choking gasp the wounded man fell heavily on his face. At this instant, and before Giovanni could collect his thoughts after the fearful deed that he had committed, Marietta's window was thrown open, and the girl herself, aroused by the

noise, ran out to ascertain its cause. Giovanni turned furiously towards her, and was about to vent his rage in violent imprecations, when the loud report of a pistol was heard, and he fell forward into his sister's arms with a bullet through his brain. The detonation and Marietta's piercing screams alarmed the whole house, and the Count, accompanied by his servants, bearing lights, was quickly on the terrace. A terrible spectacle met his gaze. Seated on the stones, between her dead and her dying brother, was the unfortunate Marietta Castagni. One of her hands was playing with Giovanni's fair, blood-bedabbled hair. She looked up and laughed vacantly as her father approached. Her reason had fled. *She was mad.*

"Cæsare di Gabrella's grief, when he learnt the fearful news, was such that for many weeks he had to be constantly watched, in order to prevent him from committing suicide. That he was himself the direct,

though innocent, cause of that awful tragedy, he could not doubt; for Francesco, who died on the following day, recovered sufficient strength before he expired to relate, in a few words, the story of this double and fatal mistake. Finding himself thus suddenly attacked on the terrace, he had, in the confusion of the moment, imagined that he had fallen into an ambush, and contriving, by a supreme effort, to draw his pistol, had fired at his assailant, unhappily with too true an aim.

“For two years Cacsare lived in the strictest seclusion. At his father’s death he sold the whole of the family estates, and left Palermo, with the avowed intention of never returning to his native country. For more than twenty years he has now been wandering through Europe and the East, universally admired, honoured, respected and—feared. The old Count Castagni has long been dead. The wretched Marietta, hope-

lessly insane, still lives in a private asylum at Florence.

"You, Messieurs," added the young Sicilian, "who are not imbued with our Southern belief, — or superstition, if you choose to call it by that name, — may possibly see in this strange series of disasters only a certain number of unhappy coincidences. For my own part, I candidly confess that I believe most firmly in the evil power of the *mal' occhio*, and I sincerely pray that neither I nor any of my friends may ever be brought into contact with that terrible and fatal man."

The last words had hardly passed Mariani's lips, when the door of the dining-room was thrown open, and Alphonse, in a sonorous voice, announced, —

"MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS DE GABRELLA!"

CHAPTER III.

FOUL PLAY.

He who filches from me my good name.

SHAKESPEARE.

DE CLÈRE had the reputation, amongst his own set, of being "the coolest hand out." In point of fact, the passion of play had so completely mastered and absorbed all his mental faculties, that it seemed as if nothing else in the world had any longer the power to cause him the slightest emotion. He scarcely ever touched wine, that deadly enemy to clear-headedness and quick calculating powers; never smoked; never joined in any kind of sport, with the exception of pigeon-shooting, in which he was an adept; and was commonly supposed never to have loved a woman in his life.

The following anecdote was often told in illustration of his singular, and somewhat heartless, self-possession.

Play was running high one night at the Petit Cercle, in Paris. The whist-table at which De Clère sat was surrounded by excited backers, and the points had gradually crept up to fifty Napoleons, while the long and short odds were given and taken in hundreds. De Clère and his partner had won the first, and lost the second, game of a rubber; and, reckoning the points, the short odds and some heavy outside bets, the inveterate gambler had nearly fifteen thousand francs staked on the result. The third game was toughly contested, and the score at last stood at "four all." In the deciding hand, De Clère held good cards, and made six tricks in succession. He then played a small trump, and his left-hand adversary covered it with the knave. It was now the turn of De Clère's partner to play. He was a short-

necked, corpulent Frenchman, and had been observed several times during the course of the evening to press his hand to his forehead, as if in pain. Just as he was about to play to the seventh trick, the blood rushed violently to his face, and he fell heavily forward on the table in a fit of apoplexy, letting the cards drop from his hand. The other players immediately started to their feet, and a general rush was made to raise the dying man; but De Clère kept his seat unmoved, only remarking, in a clear, distinct voice, "You can treat my partner's hand as exposed cards, gentlemen, and call them. There is the ace of trumps among them, which is all we require to make the odd trick. He has not left the table, and *he cannot be quite dead yet*, so the game and the bets hold good!"

It need, therefore, be no matter of surprise if De Clère alone now heard Alphonse's startling announcement with perfect equanimity, and without a trace of emotion on

his calm, passionless features. But the others were far from exhibiting the same unconcern. The American officers started visibly; even Kenneth looked up with undisguised astonishment depicted on his stolid countenance; the French journalist, who had been taking notes, uttered an exclamation of delight: he had already sketched out in his own mind the plot of a grand melo-drama, which was to bear the same title as the preceding chapter, and here was the *entrée en scène* of his hero furnished to him ready-made! Ravoli, who, in spite of his hardened cynicism and worldly wisdom, had never been able to divest himself entirely of the superstitions of his native country, turned pale; while Mariani pushed back his chair in absolute terror, and, seizing a small coral charm which he wore on his watch-chain, pointed it full at the unexpected intruder.

Lascelles was as little addicted to superstition as most other young Englishmen, but

even he could not suppress a start of disagreeable surprise. He immediately rose, and advanced to greet his uninvited guest with much outward cordiality, but with inward feelings very nearly akin to those of Don Juan when welcoming to his supper-table the grim, avenging statue of the murdered Commander.

The Marchese was not acquainted with the remainder of the party, and Lascelles therefore introduced them each by name. He glanced round in quest of Mariani, but he had mysteriously disappeared.

"Lascelles has thirty thousand francs of mine," said the young Sicilian, that same evening, to a friend at the Casino; "but I would rather give up my chance of revenge for ten times that sum than play in the same room with Gabrella."

"Have you been long back from the East, Marquis?" inquired Walter, as they resumed their seats.

"Only a few days," answered Gabrella. "I am now on my way to America, but had determined to stay here a day or two in order to see whether I could change my luck at the tables. Hearing, by a mere chance, that you were in the hotel, I hastened to seize the opportunity of renewing my thanks for the great service which you rendered me some two years ago. You may not know," he continued, addressing the other guests, "that Captain Lascelles and I were once wrecked together in a surf-boat, in the Straits of Babel-Mandeb."

"Strange to say, Captain Lascelles was mentioning that very circumstance not an hour ago," replied one of the Frenchmen. "It appears that you and he were the only survivors."

"I see, by the way in which you speak of the occurrence, that his modesty has induced him to suppress one very important fact in his narrative," said the Marchese, smiling.

"I was still suffering from the effects of a fever from which I had only recently recovered ; and, being still too weak to swim long, I should have infallibly perished if Captain Lascelles had not most gallantly risked his life to keep me afloat until assistance arrived."

"You make far too much of that affair, Marquis," said Lascelles. "It so happens that I swim like an alligator ; and I can assure you that I was never in the least danger. Have you tried your luck against Monsieur Blanc's bank yet?" he added, desirous of diverting the conversation from the subject of his own exploits.

"Yes, I have just been playing."

"With what luck?"

"Always the same—bad."

"You have lost?"

"On the contrary, I broke the roulette bank in half-an-hour. They were obliged to suspend the game, and send to the

cashier's office for some fresh supplies, in order to start it again."

"And you call that bad luck?"

"I do," answered Gabrella, "though I am well aware that most players would call it exactly the reverse, and that I run the risk of being accused of an affectation of eccentricity. I do not play to make money, but in search of emotion. By some strange fatality, I invariably win; and I am thus deprived of that source of excitement which other men find in the caprices and changes of fortune."

"And does your good (or bad) luck only attend you at the public gambling-tables, or does it also adhere to you when you play in private?" asked one of the Americans.

"At all times, and in all places, my luck is invariable," replied Gabrella. "I think I may safely say that I never yet sat down to play without rising a winner."

"Then you will have a chance of break-

ing the spell this evening," rejoined the American; "for Captain Lascelles, who is the most fortunate card-holder in Nice, and who has quite cleaned us all out, is going to set an *écarté* bank of thirty-five thousand dollars."

"I should but ill requite the service which he once rendered me by saving my life if I sat down to win his money," replied the Marchese.

"Pray do not allow that consideration to stand in your way," said Walter, hastily. "My own luck has really been quite marvellous lately, and I am curious to see which of us will prove to be the real favourite of the blind goddess."

Thus urged, Gabrella consented to engage in the struggle, only premising that he would confine his stake to five louis on each game. The gain of this trifling sum would, he remarked, fully suffice to establish the superiority of his luck, and he would thus be spared

the qualms of conscience which he should feel if he won a larger amount. The whole party then adjourned to the adjoining room; cards were called for, and the battle began in earnest.

As on the former occasion, Lascelles took the *chouette*, holding all the bets offered, while De Clère was, by unanimous consent, elected to the post of card-holder for the opposing party. At first it seemed as if Fate were, indeed, determined obstinately to favour the Marchese. Walter lost the first three games without scoring a single point. The stakes, it is true, were small—the gamblers not having yet warmed to their work. At the fourth game, the bets rose, De Clère himself staking no less than ten thousand francs, and the table was thickly strewn with rouleaux and loose gold. At the end of the third hand, Walter's score stood at four to his opponent's two. He made the odd trick, and won the game.

“The ice is broken at last, Marquis,” he

exclaimed, looking up gaily, with a triumphant smile.

“Not yet,” replied Gabrella, quietly. “I have been staking each time in hundred-franc notes, and you will perceive that there is nothing but gold on the table now. The fact is that I did not bet on the last game.”

Lascalles flushed angrily. He cared but little for the money, having come fully prepared to lose back his winnings; but the idea that his luck depended entirely on the forbearance of another man, galled him to the quick. In tones of irritation he reminded Gabrella of his promise to stake five louis on each game, and called on him almost peremptorily to fulfil it in future. Reluctantly enough, the Marchese drew from his pocket-book a hundred-franc note, which he laid on the table, and the fifth game commenced.

Lascalles was now thoroughly roused. He could play well when he chose to take the trouble to do so, and he now did his

very best. Not a single trick did he lose by his own fault; and more than once Fortune seemed weary of persecuting him, and allowed him to reach the score of "four to nothing"; but he could never succeed in passing that tantalising figure. Slowly but surely De Clère gained on him, and in less than an hour he had lost seventeen consecutive games, and his capital had dwindled down to less than five hundred pounds.

As Walter was about to deal again, Ravoli, who was sitting near the table with Douglas, neither of them having taken any pecuniary interest in the match, remarked to the Major,—

"I wonder that Lascelles does not call for fresh cards. I am sure that those he is playing with are bringing him bad luck."

High play will make even the coolest and most sensible of men superstitious. Lascelles overheard the remark, and caught eagerly at the idea. Alphonse was sum-

moned, and, obedient to Walter's order, brought a fresh pack of cards, which he handed to him on a silver tray. At the same moment the napkin on his arm slipped, and fell under the table. He stooped, and picked it up. This trifling incident passed quite unnoticed; and, indeed, so intensely was the general interest concentrated on the play, that nobody thought of remarking the extraordinary fact of Alphonse's appearance *la serviette au bras*, like an ordinary waiter.

Walter dealt amidst a dead silence. If he again lost, this would be his last game, for De Clère had announced that he held the whole of his remaining capital in a single bet. Slowly and one by one the Frenchman took up his five cards. As his practised fingers touched the first, he started almost imperceptibly, and glanced sharply at his adversary, but made no remark. After a moment's hesitation, he proposed. Lascelles refused, marked the king, and won

the *vole*, i. e., made every trick, thus scoring three points. De Clère dealt for the next hand, and Walter won the odd trick. His score was now again "four to nothing," and it was his turn to deal, which secured to him the additional chance of turning up the king, and thus winning the game off-hand. Amid breathless excitement, he slowly and carefully dealt the cards, using every precaution to avoid the fatal "mis-deal," which would have caused the hand to pass to his adversary. He paused a few seconds before turning the trump. De Clère, without raising his cards from the table, which the rules of the game forbade him to do until the trump-card had been shown, was slowly passing his fore-finger along their edges. His usually passionless features wore a strange look of painful surprise. Ravoli's eyes, which were intently fixed on his face, gleamed with diabolical joy.

Lascelles turned the trump.

It was the king of spades !

Every look was instantly bent on the table, to see if Gabrella's hundred-franc note were there. It lay, unmistakably conspicuous, among the glittering heaps of gold. The spell was broken, the Marchese was vanquished, and a cry of surprise broke from the lips of the players, who had learnt to look on Lascelles's defeat as a foregone conclusion.

De Clère pushed back his chair, and rose from his seat. He was deadly pale, and the singular expression of his face at once arrested the attention of all present.

"I am extremely sorry to be obliged to call your attention to a fact which invalidates the last game," he said, in a low, distinct voice; "but the suspicion which was aroused in my mind at the beginning of the first hand having now become a certainty, I can no longer refrain from speaking."

"Suspicion! What the devil do you

mean by that?" exclaimed Walter, starting angrily to his feet.

Blank astonishment was depicted on every countenance. Douglas quietly stepped forward, and placed himself at his friend's side.

"The fact may possibly admit of some satisfactory explanation," continued De Clère, in an unmoved voice. "If so, nobody will rejoice more sincerely than myself. I must, however, state, and I fully accept the responsibility of the statement, that the cards with which Captain Lascelles has just dealt, and of which the five that I hold in my hand form part, are a *marked and prepared pack*."

Exclamations of incredulous surprise greeted this astounding assertion. Lascelles himself stood mute with bewilderment. He scarcely seemed to understand the full import of De Clère's words.

"Impossible!" cried Ravoli, quitting the group of players, which he had joined

during the last game, and passing to the side of the table where Walter and Kenneth stood alone, side by side. "Quite impossible, De Clère; you must be making some mistake. Nobody would believe such a thing of Captain Lascelles. Besides, the cards were brought in properly sealed up with the hotel seal."

"I bring no accusation against Captain Lascelles," replied the Frenchman, quickly. "I merely assert that this pack has been tampered with, and that the last game, consequently, cannot be counted. As for my being mistaken, please to examine the cards for yourselves, Messieurs; and you will find that the court-cards are all pricked in such a manner that an experienced player could, by merely feeling them, distinguish them from the others blindfold.

Lascelles eagerly snatched up the portion of the pack which still lay on the table, and examined it minutely.

"You are perfectly right, M. De Clère," he said, unhesitatingly; "these cards have certainly been marked, though by whom, or for what purpose, I cannot imagine. You distinctly saw the pack handed to me by the waiter, gentlemen," he continued, appealing to the other players, "and I opened it before your very eyes. I threw the paper on the floor, and it must be there still."

"Here it is," said one of the Frenchmen, stooping, as he spoke, to pick it up. "*Mon Dieu!* what is this?"

His face was horror-struck as he rose, holding in his hand the torn paper and an *unopened pack of cards*, which he had found lying on the ground, close to Lascelles's feet.

An instant change came over the countenances of all but Douglas, Ravoli, and Gabrella. At the same moment the same thought flashed across every mind. The affair admitted only of one solution. Las-

celles had evidently adroitly substituted for the cards handed to him by the waiter a prepared pack, which he had brought concealed about his person ; and, in endeavouring to hide the former in his pocket, had dropped them accidentally under the table. The strangely opportune appearance of the king of spades, and the singular fact that, after so long a run of ill luck, Lascelles should have immediately won a game with the new cards, seemed to point irresistibly to this conclusion. During the moment of stupor which ensued, De Clère was engaged in narrowly scrutinizing the seals on the torn paper. Throughout the whole of this painful scene he had spoken in cold, but polite, tones ; but there was an undisguised sneer in his voice as he now said,—

“The seals on this paper have evidently been broken and re-fastened. As I mentioned before, I decline to pay my loss on the last game. I now beg to add that I

also refuse to sit down again at the same card-table with Captain Lascelles."

He turned on his heel to leave the room, and most of the others were preparing to follow his lead, when Walter, livid with fury, rushed between them and the door.

"By God," he exclaimed, in a voice choked with rage, "you shall give me satisfaction for that insult, M. De Clère!"

The Frenchman gazed coldly at the infuriated young officer. The words dropped from his lips with quiet and distinct emphasis, as he replied with icy hauteur,—

"I am, both by inclination and on principle, averse to the use of strong language, Captain Lascelles, but you force it on me. I beg you to understand that I formally refuse to cross swords with a man whom I must, until some more satisfactory explanation is furnished, decline to look upon as a fit opponent for a man of honour and a gentleman."

Walter's left hand was clenched. In another instant it would have been dashed straight into the speaker's face; but Douglas's quick eye had caught the movement. He instantly seized Lascelles's arms in an iron grasp, and, while he struggled desperately but vainly to wrench himself free, De Clère and his friends left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TELEGRAPHIC MESSAGES.

Aliquis latet error.

VIRGIL.

ON the same evening, at about half-past ten, Miss Lascelles and Clara Warburton were sitting together in the drawing-room of the villa at Carabacel. The former was busily engaged in working a pair of most elaborate slippers for her nephew, while at the opposite side of the table Clara was writing a long letter to her uncle, in which she endeavoured to raise his drooping spirits, and to cheer him by talking hopefully and gaily of their speedy re-union, and of her approaching marriage. But a cloud rested on her own brow, and her face was far from reflecting the cheerfulness of her letter.

"Do you know, aunt," she said, looking up suddenly from the paper, "that I do not feel at all satisfied about uncle George?"

"Why not, my dear?" answered Miss Lascelles, placidly. "You know that we can depend entirely on Doctor Gaveston, and that he has promised to tell us the whole truth about my brother's health."

"Yes, I know that," replied Clara, "and I have perfect confidence both in his friendship and in his medical skill; but I do not like the low spirits and hypochondria that he speaks of."

"But you must remember, dear, that he speaks of those symptoms as being quite common in patients who are suffering from asthma, and says that they really mean nothing at all."

"Well, I suppose he knows best, and must be right," said Clara, evidently still unconvinced; "but, in spite of all that, I cannot help feeling uneasy."

At this instant, a loud knock at the front door resounded through the house.

"Goodness gracious, what can that be?" exclaimed Miss Lascelles, starting almost out of her chair. "What can anybody want here at such an hour in the evening?"

"A messenger from the telegraph office with a despatch, Mademoiselle," announced the French maid; "but he says that he must deliver it to you himself, as there is a pre-paid answer for which he must wait."

"Let him come in immediately," said Miss Lascelles, rising in that peculiar state of trepidation into which the unexpected arrival of a telegram is wont to throw nervous and elderly ladies.

The messenger was introduced. He was a tall, thin, high-shouldered man, with a black moustache and *impériale*, dressed in the uniform of the telegraphic service.

He took off his *képi* politely as he entered the room, and handed to Miss Lascelles,

whom he seemed at once to distinguish from her niece, a despatch bearing her name.

She eagerly opened it, and fell back in her chair with a faint cry of horror as she perused its contents.

Clara sprang to her side, and snatched the paper from her hands. The despatch ran as follows:—

“Lascelles dangerously ill. Wishes to see you and Clara once more. Start instantly or you may arrive too late.

“GAVESTON.”

As Clara read the terrible message half-aloud, with whitening lips, and in a voice trembling with dismay, Miss Lascelles burst into a violent fit of weeping. By a powerful effort, Clara controlled her own inclination to follow her aunt's example. Her strong, resolute nature at once asserted itself, and she instantly took the lead.

“Will the answer be sent off immediately?”

she inquired of the messenger, who stood stolidly waiting for the reply, apparently quite unconscious of the ladies' agitation.

"Certainly, Mademoiselle. The bureau of Nice is a bureau *de première classe*, and remains open all night."

The French was perfect, but was spoken with a slightly foreign accent, which, however, Miss Warburton was too much troubled to notice.

"You do not happen to know when the first train leaves for Paris?"

"The express, *vid* Marseilles, passes here at 2 A.M., Mademoiselle, and reaches Paris to-morrow evening, in time to catch the mail for England, if Mademoiselle happens to intend travelling in that direction."

Miss Lascelles was still sobbing bitterly.

Clara quietly laid her hand on her shoulder.

"We must leave by that train, aunt," she said, in a determined tone. "Will you

order the maids to pack up what we shall require while I write an answer to this, and also a telegram to Walter?"

Yielding passively to her niece's influence, Miss Lascelles at once rose and left the room to give the necessary directions, while Clara re-seated herself at the table, and rapidly indited the following messages:—

“ Doctor Gaveston,

“ Lockworthy, Devonshire,

“ England.

“ We leave Nice instantly, and shall be at Lockworthy the day after to-morrow.

“ CLARA WARBURTON.”

“ Monsieur le Capitaine Lascelles,

“ Hôtel de Paris,

“ Monte Carlo.

“ Uncle dangerously ill. We leave by 2 A.M. train. Gaveston has telegraphed. If

you can join us here, do so. If too late, follow by next train.

“CLARA.”

“Can you undertake to see both these despatches sent off at once?” she inquired of the messenger.

“Without a doubt, Mademoiselle. I will return immediately to the bureau, and Mademoiselle may be quite certain that in less than twenty minutes her messages shall be on their way to their respective destinations.”

Clara handed the paper to the official, and slipped a Napoleon into his hand; and, with many protestations of gratitude, he bowed himself out of the room.

Strange to say, instead of at once betaking himself to the bureau, according to his promise, he hurried straight to Ravoli's rooms on the Quai du Midi. The valet was out, but he let himself in with a latch-key. He went quickly into the Baron's dressing-room,

where a lamp had been left burning; and there, in a few moments, a wonderful transformation was effected. The black moustache and *impériale* were pulled off; the blue uniform, with brass buttons, was discarded; a piece of soap and a basin of water soon restored the dyed hair to its pristine carrotty hue; and there, plainly recognizable, in spite of the loss of his beard, which had, of necessity, been sacrificed to the exigencies of the rôle that he had undertaken, stood our old acquaintance, Mr. J. C. Smith, *alias* the Emperor!

It was now not far from midnight, but the Emperor's work was not yet finished. Hastily dressing in plain clothes, he again sallied out, and hurried to the telegraph office, after having first carefully read and burnt the two messages confided to his care by Miss Warburton. On arriving at the bureau, he inquired whether any telegram had been received for Monsieur Jules, "to be called for."

“Yes; a despatch to that address had arrived not five minutes ago.”

The clerk handed it to him.

The Emperor's hand shook as he tore open the envelope, but his face brightened as he glanced at the contents.

They consisted only of two words:—

“C'est fait.

“R.”

“Then the game is just played out and won,” he muttered, as he sat down to write yet another message.

Ten minutes later a telegram, acquainting Mrs. Barclay with the successful result of his expedition, was flashing along the wires to Paris; and the Emperor was strolling back to the Quai du Midi with the tranquil and *nonchalant* air of a man who has done his work to his own satisfaction, and considers himself fairly entitled to a little quiet relaxation.

* * * * *

It was past four o'clock in the morning when Ravoli rode into the yard of the livery-stable, where his horse was kept, at Nice. The Corsaire was dripping with foam, and his heaving flanks and trembling legs plainly showed that he had been ridden hard and fast. As soon as he had succeeded in waking a sleepy and surly groom, the Baron handed over the tired horse to his care, and hurried off to the Quai du Midi, which was within a hundred yards of the stables. He found the Emperor still sitting up to await his return.

"Did you get my telegram?" he inquired, eagerly and breathlessly, as he entered the room.

"I did so," answered Julius Cæsar, removing his cigar to make way for the remark.

"And has all gone well here?"

"First class," replied the American, emphatically.

"Are they gone?"

"Left by the two o'clock express, and must be well on their way to Marseilles by this time. Old lady in a devil of a state of crying and weeping. Young one keeping up appearances pretty well, but seemingly hard hit, too. By-the-bye, what a beauty she is! Barring my own dearly-beloved aunt, I don't remember having seen a female lately who would suit my taste better."

He had been drinking heavily since his return, and, with his inflamed countenance, bloodshot eyes, and sensual leer, looked not unlike a drunken satyr. The offensive insolence and coarseness of his last remark stung even Ravoli, who turned savagely on him, but quickly restrained himself, and answered quietly,—

"Yes, she is certainly very handsome; but that has nothing to do with our present business. Have you telegraphed to Mrs. Barclay?"

"I have."

"Then nothing remains to be done beyond leaving this note for him at the Grand Hôtel," said the Italian, taking from his pocket-book the letter already alluded to, and sitting down to the writing-table. "At what hour did you say that the express left?"

"At 2 A.M."

"Then I will date this 'one o'clock,' and he shall find it waiting for him on his return from Monte Carlo. I don't think he will dare to leave Nice until she arrives," he added, in an undertone, as if communing with his own thoughts; "it would look too much like a confession of guilt. If he only stays here until she comes, I can reckon on her to do the rest."

"Now, tell me how the thing went off at the Hôtel de Paris," asked the Emperor.

Ravoli briefly narrated the events of the evening.

"I thought he would have knocked De

Clère down," he remarked, after having detailed the scene described in the last chapter; "but his friend, Major Douglas, was too quick and too strong for him. As far as I am concerned, I am sorry that he did not. If a blow had passed, I do not see how De Clère could well have refused to fight him; for, although the case is one of damning suspicion, especially after turning that lucky king, yet there is no absolute *proof* that he knew that the cards were marked. De Clère shoots as well as I do, and would certainly have killed him, which would have suited my book perfectly."

"*Sapristi!* but it would not have suited *mine* at all!" exclaimed the American. "Mrs. Barclay's positive orders to me were that not a hair of his head was to be touched."

"Well, you may make your mind quite easy on that score," replied the Baron. "They have entirely given up all idea of making a fighting matter of it. As soon as

he had cooled down a bit, (and I must say I never saw a man more fearfully cut up in my life,) we held a grand consultation as to what was to be done. Alphonse was sent for; but, of course, he swore that he knew nothing about it, and had simply brought the cards from the safe as usual. I naturally expressed unbounded confidence in Lascelles's innocence, and even went so far as to hint that the marked cards were probably De Clère's, and that, having won back all his money, he had contrived, unseen, to change packs with Lascelles, in order to avert any suspicion that might have been aroused by his extraordinary run of luck."

"I don't see how he could possibly have done that without its being noticed by somebody," remarked Julius Cæsar.

"Of course he could not; but what does that matter?" exclaimed Ravoli, impatiently. "The more absurd the theory which he adopts for his defence, the better our purpose will be

fulfilled. I shall proclaim everywhere that I am quite convinced of his innocence; but that will not do him much good," he added, with a cynical laugh. "In fact, as I was the originator of the suggestion that he should call for fresh cards, I dare say that some people will be charitably disposed to look on me as his accomplice. However, there can be no shadow of proof about that; so I dare say my reputation will not suffer much additional damage. As for Gabrella, he swears that he was paying the closest attention to the game, and that no sleight-of-hand could possibly have been practised by Captain Lascelles unperceived by him. Nobody will doubt his sincerity; but he is alone against six or seven others, and it will be said that he is making a mistake."

"And what decision did you come to?"

"None at all. After a long discussion, the final resolution was adjourned to this afternoon; and we are all four to meet at

Lascalles's rooms at one o'clock, in order to take some determination. By that time he will have had this note from his cousin. They arrive here by the nine o'clock train, so I shall take it over myself at eight. What will be the result of our conference, I cannot even guess yet; but, provided that he can be detained here until Mrs. Barclay arrives, I shall be perfectly satisfied."

By the nine o'clock train Walter, accompanied by Kenneth Douglas and the Marchese di Gabrella, arrived at Nice, and drove straight to the Grand Hôtel. As they entered the hall, the porter stopped Lascalles and handed him a note.

"A note for Monsieur," he said, "which was brought during the night by a commissionaire from the railway station."

He had received his instructions, enforced by a couple of Napoleons, from Ravoli.

Walter glanced at the address. It was in Clara's well-known handwriting.

"From the railway station!" he repeated, looking hard at the man; "are you not making a mistake?"

"No, sir," replied the porter, unhesitatingly. "It was brought by a commissionaire whom I know quite well, and whose post is at the station. He even mentioned that it had been given to him by one of two ladies who had just taken their tickets for Paris."

An instinct sharpened by his present intense mental anguish seemed to warn Lascelles that some new misfortune was about to befall him. With a trembling hand he tore open the envelope.

Gabrella and Douglas had walked upstairs, and had entered the latter's dressing-room. They had not been there three minutes when the door was opened, and Walter, white to the very lips, appeared on the threshold. His set, stony look of misery changed into a ghastly smile as his eyes

met Gabrella's, and he broke into a short dreary laugh, which it was heart-rending to hear.

"I am afraid that I was too ready to disbelieve in Onofrio Mariani's story about your fatal influence, Marquis," he said. "Kenneth, read that letter."

He handed him the paper as he spoke, and then, seating himself mechanically in a chair, leant his elbows on the table, covered his face with his hands, and remained quite motionless and silent.

Clara's letter was short and cruel. It ran thus:—

"Carabacel, 1 A.M.

"My Dear Walter,

"I have not the courage to see you again, so I shall leave Nice in an hour, and will send this to your hotel from the station. What I have to say will give you pain, and yet it must be said. My feelings towards you have changed; for

what reason, it is not necessary to state here. I shall always love you as a cousin, but I cannot marry you. Not wishing to meet you again until the first edge of your disappointment is blunted, I have persuaded my aunt to accompany me to Paris. When we meet again, you will feel that I have acted for the best. Forgive me, and—adieu.

“CLARA.”

CHAPTER V.

PUBLIC OPINION.

La race humaine est ainsi faite, qu'elle aime toujours mieux croire au mal qu'au bien.

JEAN J. ROUSSEAU.

THE excitement caused by Mrs. Barclay's sudden and unexplained departure was mild in comparison with the sensation created in Nice when the news of the events of the previous night spread like wildfire through the town. At Monte Carlo the tidings had been at once carried to the Casino by De Clère and his backers. The American officers had conveyed the news to the fleet at Villafranca. One of the French journalists had actually driven back to Nice in the small hours of the morning, in order to

insert a most piquant and highly-coloured narrative of the scene at the Hôtel de Paris in the morning edition of the *Phare du Littoral*, wherein the principal personages figured as the MM. X—, Y—, and Z—, so familiar to the scandal-mongering press of France. The detection of a swindler was, indeed, no very rare or noteworthy occurrence; but, on this occasion, great additional zest was given to the affair by the fact that the supposed culprit was no slippery Italian or needy Pole, but a well-known and *bond fide* English officer; and it may safely be asserted that, long before noon, the wretched tale, distorted and exaggerated in a hundred different ways, was in the mouth of every man and woman who had the smallest pretensions to form part of the society of Nice.

Public opinion was, at first, divided. A tolerably large party refused, without further and more convincing proofs, to believe in Lascelles's guilt. He was such a general

favourite, that many persons, more especially among the women, openly took his part, and boldly declared that he was the victim of some artfully-laid plot. So convinced were some of his friends of his innocence, that the absurd theory started by Ravoli would have been accepted by many of them ; and it is more than probable that if Walter had taken advantage of this first impression to show himself immediately in public, and to treat the charges brought against him with outspoken contempt, he might have succeeded in rallying a strong majority in his own favour. Such a course he would, under different circumstances, have undoubtedly pursued ; but, unhappily for him, Clara's letter, the genuineness of which he did not for a moment doubt, seemed to have paralyzed all his energies ; and, crushed by this second blow, he appeared to have abandoned all hope, and to have given up even the desire to defend himself.

At the consultation which was held, as agreed, in the afternoon, his despondency was painfully apparent. He took no active part in the discussion, and merely declared that he placed himself unreservedly in his friends' hands, and would adopt any line of conduct which they might choose to recommend.

Kenneth was for violent measures, and suggested that a formal challenge should be sent to De Clère.

"It appears to me that he can scarcely refuse to fight," he said to the Marchese, "if you, who are in full possession of all the facts of the case, and were actually playing against Lascelles, show your perfect confidence in his innocence by volunteering to act with me as his second."

Gabrella shook his head.

"I fear that you are mistaken, Major Douglas," he replied. "It is true (and I own it without any affectation of false

modesty) that my position and my reputation as a man of honour are firmly enough established to give my word, in any ordinary case, considerable weight. But, in the present instance, I should lose much of my authority. Unfortunately, as you may remember, I mentioned last night, in the hearing of the whole party, that Captain Lascelles once saved my life. You cannot doubt that I am most desirous of rendering him any service in my power ; but you will at once perceive that my championship would lose much of its weight on account of the grave suspicion of partiality to which I must be open. I am quite ready, if Captain Lascelles wishes it, to carry a hostile message to M. De Clère ; but I am convinced that he will again refuse to meet him, and that public opinion will support him in his refusal."

Douglas bit his lip, and stroked his long moustache reflectively.

"Could he not force him into fighting, by walking up to him and striking him on the public promenade? I am almost sorry now that I stopped his hand last night."

"Possibly that plan might succeed," answered the Marchese; "but it would be a highly dangerous proceeding. It would then be open to M. De Clère to summon him before the *police correctionnelle*. If he chose that course, it would certainly lead to a judicial inquiry into the origin of the quarrel, and possibly to a prosecution for alleged swindling.* If, on the other hand, he agreed to fight, the acceptance of the challenge would generally be looked upon as a mere

* The laws of France differ, in this respect, from the laws of England. The *Code Napoléon* takes cognizance of cheating at cards, even in a private house, which it assimilates to *escroquerie*. Many of our readers will remember the conviction of M. Calzado, then Director of the Italian Opera, and of M. Garcia, the famous Spanish gambler, on the charge of having used marked cards at the house of La Barrucci, a well-known *demi-monde* heroine. The two accomplices were sentenced, the latter *in contumaciam*, to five years' penal servitude.

act of condescension on his part ; and, whatever might be the issue of the duel, your friend's reputation would not be in any wise cleared by it. All he could prove in the encounter would be his courage ; and he has not been accused of cowardice, but of unfair play."

"But, in God's name, what *are* we to do then ?" exclaimed Kenneth, with desperate emphasis. "Surely you do not mean to say that a man's whole career is to be blasted, and his whole life ruined, by such a vile slander as this !"

"Certainly not," answered Gabrella, "if by any human efforts such a catastrophe can be averted. What little can be done at present I have done already. I have consulted a lawyer this morning, and his advice is that Captain Lascelles should take the initiative of legal proceedings by bringing an action against M. De Clère for slander. The case cannot come before the Court for at

least three weeks. Meanwhile, I have telegraphed to a countryman of mine in Paris to send us the best detective he can find. During the interval which must elapse before the trial he will go to work here, and endeavour to solve the mystery which at present surrounds the whole affair. More than this I do not see that we can, at present, do."

"Have you any notion that anybody in Nice owes you a grudge, Lascelles?" inquired Ravoli, who was standing on the hearth-rug, in his favourite British attitude.

"Nobody that I know of," answered Walter, in a dull, monotonous voice, turning away from the window, out of which he had been listlessly gazing during this conversation.

"If you had any grounds for suspecting anybody of being your enemy, that might possibly afford us some clue."

"I do not suspect anybody in particular,"

replied Lascelles, wearily. "To me the whole business seems to be shrouded in impenetrable darkness, in which I fail to detect a single ray of light."

His tone was so utterly nerveless and despondent that Douglas was about to upbraid him with his despondency; but a single glance at that pale, despairing face froze the reproof on his lips, and he remained silent.

It was late in the afternoon when the quartette broke up, after having finally resolved to act on the Marchese's suggestion, and sent instructions to the lawyer to commence proceedings against M. De Clère at once. But Ravoli still found time to pay a few visits, and to spend half-an-hour at the Cercle Masséna. With fiendish delight he noted that everywhere a strong re-action had set in against Lascelles.

The news of Miss Warburton's departure was now universally known, and was, of

course, interpreted in his disfavour. The fact that she could not possibly have been informed of what had taken place at the Hôtel de Paris when she made up her mind to leave Nice was charitably ignored; and it was admitted on all sides, as an incontrovertible fact, that her flight was attributable to her belief in his guilt. This was a staggering blow to his partisans. If *she* gave him up, why should anybody else take the trouble to defend him? After all, it is far sweeter to the average human mind to believe in evil than in good; and there are few persons who, as long as they are not personal losers by the discovery, do not experience a certain sneaking satisfaction, widely at variance with their outspoken protestations of grief and horror, when one of their friends unexpectedly turns out to be a forger or a thief.

“Défiez-vous du premier mouvement; il est presque toujours le bon,” said Talleyrand;

and the good people of Nice followed the maxim of that cynical diplomatist to the very letter. After a few hours given to the first favourable impression, the tide of public opinion turned. The men (and their name was legion), who were envious of Lascelles's good looks and popularity, and the women whom he had unfortunately neglected to dance with, were, of course, loudest in their denunciations of his villany. Many of his *ci-devant* partisans, while taking all due credit to themselves for their previous charitable view of the case, and carefully stating that they only succumbed most unwillingly to the irresistible nature of the evidence, joined in the cry. A few were even to be found who had "always thought and always said that there was something queer about that fellow Lascelles," and soon the voices of Kenneth, Gabrella, and Ravoli were alone raised in his favour amid the general hostile clamour.

Of Miss Lascelles and Clara, no news had

been ascertained beyond the bare fact of their departure. Almost immediately after reading Clara's letter Douglas had driven down to the villa at Carabacel, but had not been able to gather any further information. The cook and housemaid were alone in the house. The latter had not been at home on the previous evening, having had leave of absence to spend the night at her parents' house in a neighbouring village, and the former only knew that "ces dames" had left unexpectedly, and had deposited in her hands a certain sum of money for the current household expenses. The maid who had introduced the messenger from the telegraph office had accompanied the ladies, and Kenneth consequently heard nothing of this feature of the case.

Although it did not for an instant occur to the Major to doubt the authenticity of Miss Warburton's letter, he strongly urged Walter to write to her under cover to his

father, who would certainly know her address. This, however, the young officer positively refused to do. He was deeply wounded by the heartlessness of her conduct, and vehemently declared that, however great might be his sufferings, he would tear from his heart every remnant of his love for her. Neither would he mention to his father either the rupture of his engagement or the terrible accusation now brought against him, fearing that, in his present weak state of health, such intelligence might be productive of disastrous consequences. On her side, Clara, fully convinced that Walter was following her to England, neither wrote nor telegraphed to Nice; and thus all communication, direct or indirect, between the two cousins—which must have instantly resulted in an exposure of the forgeries perpetrated by Ravoli—was momentarily suspended.

Meanwhile, Julius Cæsar, pursuant to the orders which he had received from Mrs.

Barclay, had started for Marseilles by an early train. He arrived in that town at about six in the evening; and, having ascertained that the express from Paris was not due until near midnight, quietly betook himself to the best restaurant in the Cannebière, where, on the strength of his newly-earned wealth, he solaced himself with a *bisque aux écrevisses*, a *filet sauté au Madère*, and a *Charlotte Russe*, accompanied by a bottle of excellent *Châteauneuf du Pape*, and then wended his way down to the port.

Having there ascertained that a steamer was appointed to sail on the following morning for New York, he forthwith engaged his berth, and paid half his passage-money in advance. The Emperor was, in fact, as he himself expressed it, "quite played out" in Europe, and had formed the project of returning (with Mrs. Barclay's acquiescence, which was now certain) to his native country, and of there devoting his spare

time and his considerable capital to the noble pursuit of "euchre," "poker," and "brag." A gush of patriotism had suddenly welled up in his heart, and his soul panted for the drinking saloons of New Orleans. This little piece of private business having been duly transacted, he returned to the station, and, ordering a glass of hot brandy and water, seated himself in the buffet, lighted a cigar, and philosophically awaited the arrival of the train from Paris.

He had not long to wait. Punctual to the hour, the long, shrill whistle was heard, the express rolled into the station, and, in another minute, the platform was crowded with passengers. Among the first to alight was Mrs. Barclay, attended by Mona. She wore a thick, black veil; but the Emperor recognized her figure instantly, and hurried to meet her. By her directions, he engaged a cab, and the trio drove straight to the nearest hotel. Here Mrs. Barclay, who had

not spoken a single word during the drive, asked to be shown into a private sitting-room, and, dismissing Mona by a gesture, remained alone with Julius Cæsar.

Without taking a seat or raising her veil, she asked, in a sharp, hard voice,—

“Is it done?”

“It is.”

“Give me the details.”

The Emperor was a good narrator. In a few brief sentences he related the conception and execution of the plot.

She listened apparently unmoved.

“Then it seems that the Baron de Ravoli has been the principal agent in carrying out my orders,” she said, as he concluded his tale. “I do not say this with any intention of denying your claim to the full reward; I merely mean that he will be even better able than yourself to put me in full possession of all that has taken place.”

“That he certainly will,” replied Julius

Cæsar, who was quite willing to give Ravoli his full share of credit, when once assured that his own interests were safe. "He has remained on friendly terms with Captain Lascelles too, and can keep you up to all his moves."

"That will suffice," answered Ellen, still speaking in the same harsh, business-like tone. "Here is a cheque on my bankers in New Orleans for the reward I promised you, and they shall receive orders at once to honour your yearly drafts for the income. Here is a letter I had prepared for them; you can post it yourself."

"Then you have no objection to my return to America?"

"Go anywhere you like," she answered, carelessly.

"Thank you," said the Emperor, carefully depositing the precious papers in his pocket; "and the further the better, I suppose. I must also mention that I gave Ravoli a

bill on you for ten thousand francs, for his share of the work."

"Very well; it shall be paid," replied the widow, curtly. "Now I do not require your services any longer. You may go."

The dismissal was rather abrupt; but Julius Cæsar was of a practical turn of mind, and slow to take offence. His work was done, and the money was safe in his pocket. With a low bow, and a brief expression of gratitude, he left the room and the hotel.

Ellen Barclay summoned Mona, and wrote a despatch to Ravoli, requesting him to await her in his rooms at five o'clock on the following afternoon, which she ordered her to send off at once. Then, as soon as she was alone in her room, the mask fell, and the miserable woman, overcome by an agony of remorse, burst into hysterical sobs, and beat her breast and tore her flesh with her nails until the blood flowed profusely down her white, heaving bosom.

CHAPTER VI.

ELLEN'S RETURN.

Cherchez la femme.

DE SARTINES.

ON the afternoon of the following day, Major Douglas, the Marchese di Gabrella, and Walter Lascelles were again assembled at the Grand Hôtel, in deep and earnest consultation with Monsieur Claude, the famous detective, who had just arrived from Paris. The Baron was not present. He had never yet been brought into direct contact with Monsieur Claude, but he knew that that redoubtable police officer was well acquainted with the darker side of his life, and had long had his eye on him. It is true that the plot had been so carefully combined, and artfully carried out, that he had but little fear of

detection, and he was utterly indifferent to mere suspicion unaccompanied by any tittle of proof; still he felt an unconquerable aversion to meeting the detective's keen, piercing gaze, and had found in urgent private business a plausible pretext for not being present at the conference.

Monsieur Claude was, or rather seemed to be, at the moment of his appearance in the present history, (for so numerous and perfect were his various disguises that his most intimate acquaintances scarcely knew the face and form which he had been endowed with by nature,) a placid, white-haired and highly benevolent-looking old gentleman of about sixty. An ill-fitting, grey tweed travelling suit, large blue spectacles, and a green *étui* slung across his shoulder by a broad leather strap, gave him a general resemblance to a German professor on a botanizing expedition. His figure was portly, his gait heavy and plodding, and his ex-

pression so extraordinarily vacuous and wandering that the Major and Gabrella had stared almost incredulously as he presented his card, on which was engraved :—

MONSIEUR B. CLAUDE, INSPECTEUR DE LA BRIGADE DE SURETÉ, <i>Rue de Jérusalem.</i>
--

There could, however, be no real doubt concerning his identity; and, after the first moment of surprise, Douglas requested him to be seated, and proceeded to explain to him in minute detail all the circumstances of the case. He listened most attentively, with his face turned towards the speaker; but, if the thick blue glasses had not concealed his eyes, it would have been noticed that they never for an instant wandered from Walter's countenance. He smiled a feeble, watery smile when Ravoli's name was mentioned, and nodded his head several times as

the tale proceeded, as if in approval of the narrator's style, but offered no interruption.

"You have told the story very clearly, Monsieur le Major," he remarked, as Kenneth concluded his narrative. "Now Monsieur le Capitaine will perhaps be kind enough to answer a few questions. The name of the Baron de Ravoli has been mentioned; was he, to your knowledge, pecuniarily interested in the game?"

"Certainly not, to my knowledge," replied Lascelles. "In fact, I am convinced that he was not interested in the match at all."

"Has he any reason to dislike you?"

"None, that I am aware of. We have always been, and are still, on very good terms. You surely do not suspect him?"

"I always make it a rule to suspect everybody in a case of this kind," answered the detective, evasively. "I suspected *you* until I had watched your face while Monsieur le Major was speaking. Can you tell me," he

added, "the name of the attendant who brought in the cards?"

"They were brought by the head waiter," answered Lascelles, "and I think I heard him called 'Alphonse.'"

Monsieur Claude again smiled dubiously, as he made a note in his pocket-book, in which he had already written the names of all the players present. He studied the list for a few moments. Then he shook his head, and muttered,—"*Cherchons la femme!*"

"Monsieur le Capitaine," he said aloud, and in firmer tones, "I have now a more delicate question to ask. It is this: Have you had any love affair since you have been in Nice? I earnestly beg you to give me a straightforward answer," he continued, seeing that Walter hesitated. "I am tolerably well acquainted with the history and antecedents of most of the gentlemen whom you have named, with the exception of the Ameri-

can officers; and, accepting for a moment the probable theory of a conspiracy, I can guess who may possibly have been the agents employed by your enemies, whoever they may be. There are, therefore, two methods of investigation open to me. I can either act on my rather vague suspicion, and endeavour to work my way back from the agents to the principal, or reverse that operation, and, by a careful consideration of all the surrounding facts, seek to discover the principal at once, and then work my way down to the agents. This latter course, when practicable, I have usually found to be the better of the two; and, in such cases, experience says, '*Cherchons la femme.*'"

"I will tell you all that you wish to know," replied Walter, slowly; "but I do not think that you will find any clue there."

"We shall see," answered Monsieur Claude, philosophically.

Lascelles briefly related the painful history

of his engagement to his cousin, and of its sudden termination.

"Have you kept the letter which Mademoiselle wrote to you?" inquired the detective.

"I have."

"Then I must ask you to show it to me. I can well understand your unwillingness to place in my hands a document of so essentially private a nature; but you must understand that a detective, in many respects, resembles a physician, and that unless all the symptoms of the case are clearly laid before him, he cannot hope to discover the real source of the evil, and runs the risk of prescribing in the dark."

Kenneth and Gabrella, on being consulted, were both of opinion that the police-officer's demand should be complied with; and Walter accordingly handed the letter to him.

He read it attentively, but his face remained quite impenetrable.

"Have you any other letters from the same lady in your possession?" he inquired.

Walter produced another note written to him by Miss Warburton a few days before. The detective compared the two letters carefully, and Lascelles, who was watching his face intently, fancied that he saw the ghost of a self-approving smile flit across his features.

"Two more questions, Monsieur le Capitaine," he resumed, after a pause, during which the assumed vacuousness of his expression had given way to the half-frown of intense reflection. "Was the Baron de Ravoli acquainted with Mademoiselle?"

"Certainly."

"And has she any money?"

"She has a moderate fortune in her own right," answered Lascelles, much surprised at this singular question.

Monsieur Claude blew his nose emphatically, buckled up his bulky pocket-book, and rose from his chair.

“In that case I have nothing more to say at present. I shall now proceed at once to Monte Carlo, where I hope to make some progress towards the solution of this mysterious business. I particularly warn you, however, not to draw any conclusions of your own from any questions which I have put to you. I have myself as yet formed no theory; and nothing can be more fatal to the chances of success in an investigation of this nature than jumping, without sufficient grounds, to hastily-conceived, and, therefore, probably erroneous, conclusions.”

“When may we expect to see you again?” asked the Major.

Monsieur Claude consulted his watch.

“It is now half-past three,” he said. “I shall probably be able to return from Monte Carlo by the seven o’clock train, and may require to see Captain Lascelles at once. I do not think it advisable that I should return to the hotel; for if the adverse party became

aware of my being in communication with you, they would, of course, be doubly on their guard. I am certainly not very likely to be recognized under my present disguise; but we may be watched by sharper eyes than we fancy, and it is my rule never to run any unnecessary risk. I suggest that Monsieur le Capitaine should take a quiet stroll, from half-past seven till eight, along the beach of the Promenade des Anglais, somewhere near the bathing-machines, and I will join him there."

Lascelles had not left the hotel since his return from Monte Carlo, and had even refused to see the few persons who had called on him during that time, being determined not to re-appear in public until after that rehabilitation of his character which he hoped would result from his action against De Clère. He reflected, however, that at half-past seven it would be nearly dark, and that the Promenade, at that hour, was always quite

deserted. He therefore promised to be at the proposed rendezvous at the time mentioned, and Monsieur Claude then took his leave.

The express from Marseilles was late, and it was nearly six o'clock when Mrs. Barclay drove up to the Baron's door. Painfully alive to the great importance of every hour that elapsed, he was awaiting her arrival with feverish anxiety; and, as soon as the welcome sound of the wheels smote his ear, he ran quickly down to the *porte cochère*, to conduct her himself to his rooms. He had looked forward to this interview with a slight feeling of embarrassment; for it is a trying position for any man, however debased and lost to all sense of shame, to meet, in the character of a mere paid agent in a scheme of villany, a woman who has once received him into her house on the footing of a gentleman and a man of honour. But Ellen Barclay's own intense agitation helped to put

him at his ease, and he soon regained his customary self-possession.

As he closed the drawing-room door, she sank into a chair, and raised her veil. Her face was quite colourless and corpse-like. The heavy, dark-blue ring, which made the unnatural brightness of her great, passionate eyes appear still more vividly striking, told a tale of many a long hour of mental torture and sleepless agony. Her ashy lips were working with excitement. She leant her arm on the table, and bent eagerly forward.

"Tell me all," she whispered, hoarsely.

"Have you not heard everything that has happened from Smith, at Marseilles?"

"Yes; he told me something, but not all. Besides, you were present, and he was not. I want to hear it all again from *you*."

With minute and merciless precision, the Italian unfolded the tale of the foul conspiracy. Ellen buried her face in her hands, and shuddered violently as he graphically

detailed the terrible scene at the Hôtel de Paris, but did not interrupt his narrative even by an exclamation.

“What I have done with reference to Miss Warburton,” he added, in conclusion, “is as much in your favour as in my own. You will readily understand that I saw, from the very beginning, what object you had in view. Having several times seen you and Lascelles together, I should have been blind indeed if I had not detected the true state of the case. The present circumstances demand plain speaking, and you must excuse my bluntness. The simple facts are these. You fell in love with Lascelles, and, finding that even your charms were powerless to break the links which bound him to his cousin, you took a bold resolution, and made up your mind to ruin his character, and cause him to appear to the world as a dishonoured felon, in the hope that she would then herself cast off a disgraced lover, and, by this voluntary

retreat, leave you the undisputed mistress of the field. On my side, I loved Miss Warburton; but my suit was hopeless as long as Lascelles stood in my way. Even his removal is far from ensuring my success; but, at any rate, it multiplies my chances tenfold. So far, therefore, our interests were identical. I think, however, that your estimate of Miss Warburton's character was a mistaken one. It is my decided opinion that she would have refused to believe anything to her lover's discredit, even in the face of proofs as clear as the sun at noon, and would have clung steadfastly to him through good and evil report. Thus our object would have been defeated at the very outset, and all *your* expense, and all *our* risk and trouble, would have been incurred to no purpose. This consideration led me to have recourse to a stratagem, which has proved quite successful, in order to induce her to leave Nice. But only half of our task is

accomplished yet. Miss Lascelles and Miss Warburton started yesterday morning at two o'clock. If they have travelled without stopping, they must, at this very moment, be within a few short miles of Lockworthy. There they must at once discover that some deception has been practised on them; and, although they of course imagine that Captain Lascelles is following them by the next train, yet they may telegraph this very night to Major Douglas, on the chance of his having remained here, and thus upset all our calculations. We should, in that case, also run a great risk of discovery; for if the forgery of the telegram and the letter were once brought to light, the whole matter would probably be placed in the hands of the police,"—Ravoli had his own reasons for not mentioning Monsieur Claude at this stage of the proceedings,—“and our position would become extremely dangerous.”

Ellen raised her head.

"What do you advise then?" she inquired.

"You must see Lascelles at once," replied the Baron, unhesitatingly, "and use your utmost powers of seduction to induce him to leave Nice with you this very night. Crushed as he is by the double blow of the accusation brought against him by De Clère and of his cousin's desertion, he will probably offer but a feeble resistance; and, if you play your cards well, the game ought to be in your own hands. The difficulty is to get a *tête-à-tête* with him. I am the only person whom he will receive, excepting his friend, Major Douglas, and the Marchese di Gabrella. They are now probably dining at the *table-d'hôte*, in which case I shall find him alone in his rooms. The best plan will, therefore, be for me to take him a note from you, urgently begging him to come to you at once at your own house; and I will, of course, use every argument I can think of to

induce him to comply with your request. I suppose your *fiacre* is still waiting below?"

As he spoke, Ravoli pushed aside the curtains, and glanced into the street. Suddenly he started back with a suppressed cry of joyful surprise.

"The devil himself must be fighting on our side!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "There he goes!"

Ellen sprang from her seat, and rushed to his side.

It was a dark evening, but the streets of Nice are well illuminated. A gaslight stood exactly opposite Ravoli's windows, and by its rays Mrs. Barclay saw Walter, unmistakably recognizable in spite of the cloak which covered the lower part of his face, passing slowly along the Quai in the direction of the Promenade des Anglais.

Pale and motionless, she gazed with straining eye-balls on his retreating figure. The Baron laid his hand roughly on her arm.

"Follow him instantly, *instantly*," he exclaimed, energetically. "He cannot be returning to the Grand Hôtel, and must pass through the Jardin Public if he keeps straight on. There is never a soul there at this hour. Now, or never, is your time to make your last move, and win the battle."

Ellen started at his voice as if awakening from a trance. Then she quickly drew from her pocket a small russia-leather purse, which she threw on the table, and in another moment she had rushed from the house, and was stealthily gliding on Walter's track.

CHAPTER, VII.

ON THE BEACH.

Nay, for I love thee I will have thy hands,
Nay, for I will not loose thee, thou art sweet ; . . .
My whole face beats, I will feed full of thee, . . .
I am burnt to the bone with love, thou shalt not go.

SWINBURNE.

MONSIEUR CLAUDE'S expedition to Monte Carlo was a signal failure. On reaching the Grand Hôtel de Paris he discovered, to his great annoyance, that Alphonse had started for Nice about an hour before his arrival.

"He goes to Nice every Saturday," said the waiter who gave him this unwelcome piece of news ; "but if you are particularly anxious to see him, I can tell you where to find him."

"I shall be much obliged if you can," answered Monsieur Claude, slipping a Napo-

leon into the man's hand. "I have some news of the greatest importance to communicate to him."

"Then I will tell you what to do. He goes to see his little daughter, who is at school there, Rue de France, No. 17, and stays with her until Sunday evening. He generally fetches her from the school at about half-past seven. I know that because Alphonse is my cousin, and I have often been with him to see the child. When the weather is fine, they usually go for a walk, and then return for supper to the Hôtel de Rome, where they spend the night. To-day he has gone on foot, and can hardly reach the Rue de France before eight o'clock. If you go back by the next train you will probably be able to catch him at the door of the school; and should you miss him there, you will certainly find him later at the hotel."

But fate was clearly against Monsieur Claude on that day. It chanced that Al-

phonse was overtaken on the road by a friend of his, a money-lender from Monaco, who was driving to Nice in a dog-cart, and who offered him a lift. This offer Alphonse had accepted; the money-lender's mare was a fast trotter, and thus, on arriving at the school, the detective found that he was again too late, and that the father and daughter had left the house together some twenty minutes ago.

He hesitated for a few seconds, and then quickly made up his mind how to act. The Promenade des Anglais was close at hand. He would just walk down to the beach to inform Lascelles of the delay which had occurred, and then proceed to the Hôtel de Rome to await Alphonse's arrival. The moon had now risen, and, as he approached the Etablissement des Bains, he distinctly perceived Lascelles, at a distance of about a hundred yards, just turning off the Promenade on to the beach. He was about to quicken

his pace in order to join his client when the sight of a second figure brought him abruptly to a standstill. Cautiously gliding along the high laurel hedge which separates the Promenade from the sea-shore, a veiled woman was stealthily following Lascelles's steps. She paused for a moment as he quitted the foot-path, and watched him intently as he wended his way down the beach and seated himself on the stones near the water's edge. Then, after an instant of apparent hesitation, she again moved on and walked slowly down the sloping beach, evidently bent on approaching him unseen and unheard.

The detective screwed up his mouth as if for a long whistle, but was far too cautious to let any sound escape from his lips.

"Nom d'un petit bonhomme!" he muttered. "J'ai dit: 'cherchons la femme.' Est-ce que par hasard je l'aurais trouvée sans la chercher?"

Within ten paces of the spot where Las-

celles was sitting stood a large bathing-machine. With marvellous quickness, and with a footfall as noiseless as that of a cat, Monsieur Claude ran swiftly over the intervening stones, and in another moment he was snugly hidden in the friendly shadow of the wooden vehicle, an eager and attentive witness of this strange meeting of Ellen Barclay and Walter Lascelles.

Although the son of a poor man, Lascelles had hitherto led a very pleasant and happy life. Having no expensive tastes, he had never felt the lack of fortune. In his regiment he was universally liked; and, notwithstanding his great popularity among women, — often a most dangerous gift,—he had, by prudence or good luck, always contrived to steer clear of any *liaison* likely to lead to unpleasant consequences. Having thus, so to speak, acquired a habit of happiness, his mind, unbraced in the bitter but wholesome school of adversity, was

but ill prepared to bear the burden of the two heavy disasters which had befallen him almost simultaneously; and, benumbed by the double shock, he had for a few hours remained passive and inert. But the natural elasticity of his temperament had soon re-acted against this temporary depression. Though almost heartbroken by Clara's cruel letter, he was far too proud to claim the performance of her solemn promise, or seek to rekindle a love which she had declared to be extinct. But all the energies of his soul were aroused to repel the foul accusation brought against his honour. Secure in the consciousness of his innocence, he felt convinced that he *could* not be destined to be consigned to shame and opprobrium by that terrible, but unfounded, charge. And yet appearances were fearfully against him! Would the great detective succeed in fathoming the mystery, or must his name be for ever branded with the stigma of disgrace? With

an aching brain, and a heart racked by a thousand conflicting hopes and fears, he had proceeded to the rendezvous agreed on. Scarcely had he seated himself on the beach to await Monsieur Claude's appearance, than the faint rustle of a woman's dress caught his ear. Before he could turn his head an arm was thrown round his neck, a burning hand clasped his, and he uttered an exclamation of bewildered surprise as Ellen Barclay flung herself on her knees at his side!

* * * *

"Walter!"

"Mrs. Barclay!"

The two exclamations burst from their lips almost simultaneously; while their tone, their attitude, nay, the very difference between the familiar Christian name and the cool formal appellation, betrayed the widely dissimilar sentiments by which they were inspired. Half withdrawing himself from her embrace, Lascelles looked with chilling

coldness on the lovely woman who knelt imploringly at his side; while Ellen, with flushed cheeks, parted lips, and eyes glowing with the fire of unrestrained passion, gazed fervently and tremblingly on his pale, hard-set face. He met that burning gaze stern and unmoved. He had never *loved* her, and her presence now seemed powerless to arouse even that tumult of the senses which her slightest glance had once sufficed to stir up in his veins.

She read the change in his eyes instantaneously, and a sickening fear came over her. Had she, indeed, plotted and toiled and schemed in vain? Had she, indeed, uselessly stained her soul with an awful crime, and was the prize to be snatched at the last moment from her grasp? Her heart sank within her; but she had set her all on this last throw of the dice, and would struggle on desperately to the end of the game.

“Is it for such a reception as this, Walter,” she said, in soft-pleading tones, “that I have hastened to—”

“What has brought you here, and why have you sought me?” interrupted Lascelles, coldly.

She started at the abrupt question, and laid her clasped hands on his shoulder.

“Why have I sought you?” she repeated, and her burning breath scorched his cheek as she spoke; “why have I sought you? Because I heard that you were in sorrow and distress. Because the world has turned away from you, and even she for whose sake you once drove me from your side has deserted you. A strange and marvellous thing indeed,” she continued, with a short, bitter laugh, “that I, Ellen Barclay, should thus be humbly suing for another woman’s leavings! Yet so it is! I have sought you because I love you more than fair fame, more than fortune, more than life itself;

because I am heart-sick and burnt to the very bone with passion ; because every pulse of my body and every thought of my soul yearns towards you ; because I would choose to be a slave at your feet rather than an empress on her throne. Ah, Walter ! Walter ! I am kneeling at your feet ! Kill me as I kneel, or cast me into the waves, and I will die blessing you with my last breath. But, if you were born of woman, if you bear the heart of a man and not of a tiger in your breast, think of what I suffered once when I freely gave you up to the woman of your choice, and, in pity I pray you, do not again spurn me away."

Convulsive sobs choked her utterance. She bowed her head on her clasped hands, and her whole frame shook with the intensity of her emotion.

"For God's sake, Mrs. Barclay, calm yourself," said Lascelles, deeply moved by this wild, passionate appeal.

She raised her streaming eyes to his. The bright moon shone full on her wondrous beauty, and the old, well-remembered thrill began to quicken Walter's pulse.

"*Calm* myself! Would you tell the tortured criminal on the rack to be *calm*? Have you spent, as *I* have, eight long days and nights of sleepless and heart-racking agony? Have you hungered and thirsted for love as a starving wretch hungers and thirsts for the morsel of bread and the drop of water that may save his ebbing life? Have you ever taken up for the second time the cup once dashed from your parched lips, and trembled to see it again struck from your hands? When you have felt and suffered the bitterness of all those nameless torments, you will know what you ask of me when you tell me to be *calm*!"

"But Ellen, my poor Ellen," murmured Lascelles, and his trembling voice too clearly betrayed his growing irresolution, "you

surely cannot know the whole truth. Do you know that I am now a disgraced and dishonoured man? Do you know that I have been assailed by one of the most terrible accusations which can be brought against a man's reputation? Do you know that I have been accused of *false play at cards*, and that, unless I can disprove the charge in the teeth of almost overwhelming evidence, my name will be held up to the scorn and aversion of the world, as that of a common sharper and cheat?"

She unclasped her hands; her warm, soft arms stole round his neck, and her cheek was pressed closely to his.

"Walter," she whispered, in caressing accents, "did I not tell you that I knew of your sorrow and distress? But, were the whole world to rise up against you, were the proofs of your guilt clearer than the stars which are shining above us, I would shut my eyes to the evidence, and rather

disbelieve in my own existence than in the purity and spotlessness of your honour. And even if you yourself told me that you had stained your hands with blood, and blackened your soul with every crime which the wildest imagination could conceive, I would still rather starve on the stray crumbs of your love than feast on the richest banquet of devotion that any other living man could offer me ? ”

Lives there on earth a man, with human blood in his veins and human feelings in his heart, who could withstand the ardent pleading of a beautiful woman thus pouring out all the treasures of her love at his feet, in the splendid shamelessness of an all-powerful and irresistible passion. Ellen's arms were clinging tightly round his neck, and her sweet, quivering lips were eagerly seeking his. In another second they would have met in the kiss that must have sealed her triumph ; when suddenly, as if by the inspiration of

some good angel, a vague and undefined, but terrible, suspicion flashed across his mind.

He drew quickly back, and his piercing gaze seemed to penetrate the very depths of her soul as he slowly said,—

“Ellen, it is strange that you should so soon have learnt what has befallen me. Can you look me boldly in the face and swear by all that you hold most sacred that you have had no hand or part in anything which has happened since we last met?”

“Allons donc ; voilà la femme trouvée !” muttered Monsieur Claude, who from his hiding-place had not lost a word of the foregoing dialogue.

It was a fearful moment. Ellen’s heart stood still, and a deadly sickness well-nigh overcame her senses ; but her fierce resolution carried her through the awful trial. She rallied in an instant, and the Father of Lies must have laughed in grim approval

as she unflinchingly returned Walter's gaze, and, steadily raising her right hand, exclaimed in a firm, clear voice,—

“Before God, who sees and hears me, and who shall judge me at the last day, I swear it!”

The hard-fought battle was over. Her fatal sway had re-asserted itself, and Lascelles, clasped in her arms, had surrendered unconditionally to her influence. In another hour he would doubtless have been fast fleeing with her from Nice, leaving shame and dishonour behind him, for in such a mood she could have moulded his resolutions like soft wax, when suddenly a loud splash and a wild shriek, instantly followed by frantic and despairing shouts for help, caused them both to start simultaneously to their feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIGITUS DEI.

There is a Providence that shapes our ends.

SHAKESPEARE.

ALPHONSE and his daughter, a child of about nine, had been walking that evening on the Antibes Road, and, in returning to the Hôtel de Rome, their way lay along the Promenade des Anglais. Close to the bathing establishment, and about fifty paces from the spot where Lascelles and Ellen Barclay had met, a sort of wooden pier, thirty yards in length, runs out into the sea; and at the further end of it is fitted a long projecting spring-board, for the convenience of those bathers who prefer a "header" to any other mode of entering the water; and, although the bathing season had long been over, the

board had not yet been removed. As the father and daughter strolled quietly back along the beach, the little girl ran playfully out to the end of the pier, and stood on the narrow plank, gazing at the long silver streak which the rays of the moon cast over the rippling waves. Alphonse, who loved his child perhaps all the more dearly because he did not care for any other living creature, was alarmed at her dangerous position, and called to her to return immediately. She turned to run back to him, her foot slipped, and in another second she was helplessly struggling in twenty feet of water. When Lascelles, guided by her one piercing scream and by the cries of her agonized father, who, being unable to swim, could render no assistance to his drowning child, reached the spot, closely followed by Ellen, she was sinking for the second time. A single glance showed him the whole scene. Without pausing even to throw off his coat, he ran

quickly along the plank, dropping his cloak as he ran, and, by a well-judged spring, dived close to the spot where she had again disappeared. A few moments of breathless suspense, and then he rose again to the surface, holding the child with one hand by her long, fair hair, and swimming vigorously towards the shore. He was within ten strokes of the beach, when, with a short, sharp cry of pain, he abruptly stopped, and seemed to beat the water hurriedly with his disengaged hand. Then, by a violent effort, he again struggled on a few yards. Alphonse had rushed breast-high into the water to meet him, and, aided by a man who had mysteriously appeared amongst them, as if he had started up from the ground, he seized him by the arms and dragged him half-fainting, but still fast clutching the rescued child, to the shore. In the imperfect light, Walter had struck his head violently against one of those slender, upright, iron posts,

which are placed a few yards from the water's edge (an unvarying line in that tideless sea), and to which the safety-ropes for the bathers are fastened. The blow had been severe, and the blood was flowing freely from a deep cut on his forehead.

Ellen uttered a cry of horror as she perceived the ghastly wound, and knelt weeping by his side, vainly endeavouring to staunch the streaming blood with her pocket-handkerchief. Close at hand, Alphonse was hanging frantically over the apparently lifeless body of his daughter. But the mysterious stranger, who was no other than Monsieur Claude himself, speedily set about re-assuring them.

"It is a deep cut and nothing more, Madame," he said, after briefly examining Walter's injured forehead. "The force of the blow has stunned him; but he will come round again in a few minutes, and a strip of sticking-plaster will be all the doctoring he

will require. As for your little girl, Monsieur," he continued, addressing Alphonse, "you see that she is breathing quite freely. She has merely fainted from cold and fright; and the best thing you can do is to get her home at once, put her into a warm bed, and give her some hot wine or brandy and water."

By this time several persons from the houses on the other side of the Promenade, whose attention had been attracted by Alphonse's first cries for assistance, had hastened to the beach; and amongst them were two of the men-servants from Mrs. Barclay's house, who stared in blank astonishment on recognizing their mistress. By her directions they raised Walter from the stones on which he lay, and bore him, still insensible, to the house; while she herself hurriedly preceded them, in order to have everything prepared for his arrival, and to despatch another servant in search of a doctor.

The detective listened attentively to the orders that she gave, and then turned to Alphonse, who, with trembling hands, was lifting his little daughter from the beach.

"*Allons, Monsieur,*" he said, "you are much too agitated to carry the child safely. Just leave her to me, and be good enough to lead the way to wherever you live."

Suiting the action to the words, he raised the girl lightly in his powerful arms, wrapped his great-coat carefully round her chilled limbs, and followed Alphonse with rapid steps to the Hôtel de Rome, which was not two hundred yards further down the Promenade. The two rooms which the father and daughter occupied regularly every Saturday night were already prepared, and the child was quickly carried upstairs and laid on the bed.

"Just undress her at once, and rub her well with warm flannels, while I step out to

call a medical man," said Monsieur Claude to the landlady and chamber-maid, who, with many ejaculations of sorrow and sympathy, had rushed into the room to proffer their assistance. "There is nothing serious the matter with her. See! she is already opening her eyes!"

A doctor lived almost next door, and was luckily at home. In less than five minutes the detective returned with him to the hotel. He did not himself re-enter the room, but asked if he could be accommodated with a bed-chamber on the same floor.

The waiter ushered him into an empty room.

"Just take my card to the landlord, and ask him to lend me a dressing-gown while these wet things of mine are being dried," said Monsieur Claude, beginning to pull off his outer garments, which were dripping with water; "and mind they are dried quickly, for I shall want them again soon."

Bring me a large glass of brandy-and-water too, half-and-half and scalding hot."

The waiter glanced surreptitiously at the card, and then flew to execute his orders with a celerity that spoke volumes for the wonder-working power of those magical words, "*Brigade de Sûreté*." In an incredibly short space of time he made his re-appearance, bearing the dressing-gown over his arm, and a tray with the required refreshment in his hands.

"What is that gentleman's name, waiter?" asked the police-agent, working himself into the dressing-gown, and jerking his head in the direction of Alphonse's room.

"I do not know his surname, Monsieur. He is generally called M. Alphonse, and is *premier garçon* at the Grand Hôtel de Paris, at Monte Carlo."

"Ah! I thought so. Then just have the goodness to mention to him that the person who carried up his little daughter would be

glad to speak to him for a few minutes as soon as he is disengaged; but do not, on any account, mention my name. When he is ready, you can show him in here."

The waiter faithfully obeyed these instructions; and, after the lapse of about half-an-hour, during which the detective sat absorbed in deep thought, Alphonse entered the room.

"Well, Monsieur, how is the child?" asked Monsieur Claude.

"Thank God! she is out of all danger, and is sleeping quietly," answered the father, joyfully. "How can I ever thank you sufficiently for your—"

The detective cut short this effusion of gratitude.

"Nonsense!" he said; "what have you to thank *me* for? What did *I* do to deserve any thanks? Carried a child about two hundred paces, and walked some fifty more to fetch a doctor! If you owe any gratitude to anybody, surely it is due to the English

gentleman who plunged so bravely into the sea and rescued your daughter at the peril of his own life."

Alphonse struck his forehead with his clenched fist.

"Brute! Beast! Ass! Ungrateful pig that I am!" he exclaimed, energetically. "In my selfish grief I never even thought of thanking him for his courageous devotion. And he was wounded, too! I remember now that the blood was streaming over his face!"

"Yes, he struck his forehead against one of those iron posts with great violence; and is very severely, if not dangerously, wounded," said Monsieur Claude, quietly. "And this injury," he added, with more emphasis, "he received in saving your child from certain death."

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" cried Alphonse; "you will drive me to despair! And to think that I never even thanked him! But

you know that he was an Englishman; perhaps you can give me his name and address, that I may instantly rush to him and atone for my forgetfulness and ingratitude!"

"Yes, I know his name," answered the detective, deliberately; "and you also know him, although you did not recognize him in the semi-darkness, and disfigured as he was by the blood that covered his face."

"Then do not keep me in suspense any longer, but tell me who he is!" exclaimed Alphonse, with evidently sincere emotion.

Monsieur Claude rose from his chair. He had thrown off his disguise, and now appeared as a man barely thirty years of age, with clearly-cut and rather handsome features, short, crisply curling dark hair, and eyes as bright and piercing as an eagle's. He walked close up to Alphonse, and gazed steadily and gravely on his face.

"The name of the man who, at the peril

of his own life, saved your daughter from a watery grave," he said, in slow and solemn tones, "is Captain Lascelles; and he is the same young Englishman who, two nights ago, was accused of cheating at the Hôtel de Paris, at Monte Carlo."

It was almost a random shaft, for the detective had, as yet, no particle of evidence of Alphonse's participation in the matter; but, having once accepted the theory of a conspiracy, he did not see how it could well have been carried out without his complicity, and had therefore resolved on risking this bold experiment.

The shot, fired almost at a venture, went straight home to the mark. Alphonse stared wildly for a moment at the speaker. Then, with a low, gasping cry, he staggered back as if a bullet had struck him through the heart, and would have fallen to the ground if Monsieur Claude had not sprung forward and caught him in his arms.

Half-an-hour later Kenneth Douglas and the Marchese di Gabrella were sitting together in Walter's room, awaiting his return, when, to their great surprise, Monsieur Claude, who had again resumed his disguise, including the white wig and blue spectacles, hastily entered the room, followed by the head waiter of the Hôtel de Paris, whose still dripping clothes and pale, agitated face plainly showed that some strange and unexpected event had occurred. With marvellous brevity and precision, and in a clear, ringing voice, very different from the senile tones which he had assumed during the interview of the same morning, the detective narrated the singular scene in which he had just played so important and providential a part. It was then Alphonse's turn to speak; and in broken accents, and with every sign of the deepest grief and the most sincere repentance, he poured forth the tale of the whole plot as far as it was

known to him, without in any way endeavouring to extenuate his own guilt, or excuse his complicity in the conspiracy.

“All that I have confessed,” he added, in conclusion, “I am ready to write down and sign, or to swear in a court of justice. I know that I have rendered myself liable to severe punishment, and that, even if not prosecuted, I am henceforth a ruined man. But I am quite prepared to accept cheerfully all that may befall me; and, if I can but contribute to prove Captain Lascelles’s innocence, I shall consider that I have repaid but a small portion of the debt of gratitude which I owe him for having saved my child’s life.”

Douglas and the Marchese listened to this strange story with the profoundest astonishment.

“Then we may look on the cause as gained,” exclaimed Kenneth, when Alphonse had concluded his tale; “and, whatever

may happen, you may rest assured that you shall be no loser by your confession. With this man's evidence in our favour," he added, addressing Gabrella and the detective, "the action against De Clère can have but one result. And I do not even think that it will be necessary to bring it at all; for, on learning the true state of the case, he will assuredly at once withdraw his accusation."

Monsieur Claude shook his head.

"I do not take quite so sanguine a view of the matter, Monsieur le Major," he remarked. "In my opinion, we are not out of the wood yet. I strongly doubt whether Alphonse's unsupported word would carry weight enough to induce M. De Clère to retract his charge. And even if he did so, or if the trial came on and Captain Lascelles gained a verdict, you must remember that our witness admits that he was paid to substitute the cards. Would not persons, therefore, be found to suggest that we ourselves

had bribed him to concoct the whole story?"

"That is undeniably true," assented Gabrella, at once recognizing the force of the detective's objection.

"Besides that," continued Monsieur Claude, "we have only laid our hands on the subordinate agents yet; and, until we have discovered the first originator of the whole conspiracy, I shall look upon our work as unfinished. The Baron De Ravoli could certainly enlighten us, if we can but find the means to make him speak; but, unless we have some stronger evidence against him than this man's bare word, he will simply deny everything; and certainly, in the eyes of most people, the balance of probabilities will appear to be in his favour. I do not for a moment believe that he is the prime mover of the scheme. I said this morning, "*Cherchons la femme*"; and I am quite convinced that this grand principle is essen-

tially applicable to the present case. That lady whose conversation with Captain Lascelles I overheard this evening, and whom he addressed as Mrs.—”

“Stop,” said the Major; “I know that lady’s name, and it is quite unnecessary that you should repeat it here. Do I understand you to say that you think that the Baron De Ravoli, if he could be induced or forced to speak, would be able to reveal the origin of the plot?”

“I am quite certain of it.”

“Then just please to step this way for a minute,” rejoined Kenneth, motioning to the detective to follow him into the recess of the bay-window; “I think I know a way to unseal his lips. Excuse me for one moment, Marquis.”

The two men stood for some minutes in earnest, whispered conversation. Judging by their gestures, Douglas appeared to be propounding some plan of action, of which

Monsieur Claude vehemently disapproved. But the Major, with visible energy, persisted in his idea; and, after a brief but warm discussion, Monsieur Claude shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of unwilling consent.

“I do not deny that your plan may prove successful,” he remarked aloud, as they emerged from the corner where their conference had been held, “but it is so exceedingly bold, and so utterly at variance with the usual modes of proceeding in such cases, that, although I am no *doctrinaire*, I cannot give it my unreserved approbation. As you insist on putting it into execution, let it be clearly understood between us that you do so entirely on your own responsibility. The best that can be said for it is that, even if it fails, it will not materially impede my own ulterior action. As for your personal risk, which will be far from small, of course, that is your own business.”

“By-the-bye, are you perfectly sure that Captain Lascelles’s wound is not dangerous?” inquired Douglas, without replying to this last remark.

“A mere cut on the forehead, which stunned him for a moment, but which will be healed in three days,” answered Monsieur Claude, smiling, as he remembered that, scarcely an hour ago, he had, to suit his own purposes, magnified this trifling injury into a dangerous, if not mortal wound. “I fancy he will be well taken care of where he is; and I think that we cannot do better than to leave him there till to-morrow. I have authority to require the assistance of the local police, and I will establish such a cordon of surveillance round the house, that you may feel quite sure that he will not be moved without notice of the fact reaching us in good time. Within twelve hours your plan will have succeeded or failed. If the former, well and good. If the latter, I shall

then go to work my own way, taking as my *point de départ* the conversation that I overheard to-night, and the letter that I have in my pocket, which is an undoubted forgery. And now, *bonne chance, Messieurs, et bon soir!*”

Passing his arm under that of Alphonse, who during the whole of this conversation had stood near the door, silent and motionless, with his head sunk on his chest, Monsieur Claude left the room.

Kenneth and Gabrella conferred together anxiously for a few moments. Then the Major rang the bell, and ordered a cab to be called.

“*Au Cercle Masséna!*” he cried to the coachman, as he entered the vehicle with his friend; and in less than ten minutes they alighted together at the door of the club.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAJOR'S PLAN.

. . . turned upon him with a look of scorn,
And smote him in the face.

LONGFELLOW.

For some minutes after Mrs. Barclay's departure, Ravoli paced up and down the room in a state of febrile agitation. The triumphant success, or utter and disastrous failure, of his elaborately contrived scheme, was now a matter of a few short hours. So far, all had gone wonderfully smoothly, and not a single hitch had occurred to mar the working of the complicated machinery which he had set in motion. But the last great move, which must finally decide the game, yet remained to be played; and, as the crisis drew near, his growing excitement

reached a pitch of painful intensity. The pocket-book that Mrs. Barclay had left on the table contained notes for five times the amount which he had bargained for with the Emperor; and for a moment he entertained the idea of contenting himself with this large sum, and of quitting the country, leaving his creditors unpaid, and renouncing all hope of securing Clara's hand and fortune.

Unluckily for himself, he soon discarded this project. In spite of what he had said to Mrs. Barclay of the difficulties which still remained to be overcome, he had so long allowed his mind to dwell on the paramount necessity of removing Lascelles from his path, that he could not bring himself to admit even the possibility of failure, now that this great step seemed to be so nearly accomplished. His unconquerable vanity and extraordinary confidence in his own powers of fascination contributed also, in no small degree, to mould his resolution.

The thought of flight was quickly banished, and he determined to stand his ground at any risk, and not throw away a single chance of securing the great prize.

An English railway guide which he had been studying lay open on the table. He sat down to consult it again. By incessant travelling, and he felt sure that they would use all possible speed, Clara and her aunt could reach Lockworthy at seven o'clock. Allowing for the difference of time, they would be at the station in an hour, and the forgery of the telegram would be at once detected. He had not dared, for fear of arousing suspicion by the singularity of the question, to ask Lascelles whether he had communicated with his father. If he *had* done so, his continued presence at Nice would immediately be made known to the two ladies; and any moment might bring a despatch which, unless Mrs. Barclay succeeded in inducing Walter to leave Nice with her that very

night, would, in all probability, ruin the whole enterprise.

From his window he had breathlessly watched Ellen as she crossed the Quai, and began to walk in the direction of the Jardin Public, with a slow, steady step, which showed that the object of her pursuit was well in view. His first impulse had been to follow her and Lascelles, and endeavour to be a hidden witness of their interview; but a moment's reflection induced him to abandon so hazardous an undertaking. He had not deemed it necessary to alarm Mrs. Barclay by informing her of Monsieur Claude's arrival, and had only referred to the danger which would arise from a possible intervention of the police as a remote peril to be foreseen and guarded against. But he, of course, was quite aware that the redoubtable detective was already actively engaged in investigating the affair; and that his own name on the list of the guests

at the Hôtel de Paris was already marked with a black cross, was beyond a doubt. Unseen, but all-seeing, the emissaries of the Rue de Jérusalem (the Scotland Yard of Paris) were abroad; and, under such circumstances, he felt that it would be little less than insanity on his part to run the risk of confirming the suspicions which Monsieur Claude might entertain, by any act that should betray to those keen eyes the interest which he felt in Lascelles's movements.

Nearly two hours had elapsed, and the Italian, still wavering and irresolute, had wandered, half-mechanically, into his dressing-room. He caught sight of his face in the looking-glass, and started back horrified. Pale and haggard, with bloodshot eyes and disordered hair, he seemed to have grown ten years older in the last few hours.

"This is mere childish folly and weakness," he muttered, angrily. "After all,

what have I to fear? The Emperor by this time has got clear away. Alphonse is safe; for I know so much about him that he would not dare to turn traitor; and even if he did play us false, he could only do so by first criminating himself, and his testimony, unsupported by any circumstantial evidence, would simply go for nothing. As for Lascelles, if the woman only plays her part well, and she will certainly play it *con amore*, the hot-blooded young fool has no more chance of withstanding her entreaties and blandishments than a bird of escaping from the fascination of a rattlesnake."

He rang for his valet, and dressed hurriedly. He had just remembered that Mrs. Bodgers was "at home" that evening, and it had occurred to him that it would be well to show himself at her house, according to his usual custom, before proceeding to the Cercle Masséna, where he invariably finished his night. Another motive also guided him

to this determination. He was extremely anxious to know whether Mrs. Barclay's presence at Nice was still a secret. Mrs. Bodgers's drawing-room was the general receptacle of all the gossip of the town, and if the widow had been recognized, either at the station or during her drive to the Quai du Midi, her arrival would certainly be already known there.

As he walked through the Jardin Public, he met the French journalist who wrote for the *Échos de Nice*, and who was the most indefatigable collector, and, when necessary, inventor, of news in the whole town.

"Have you heard the news, Baron?" he inquired, excitedly, pausing for an instant in his rapid walk.

"No; what is it?"

"Terrible and mysterious affair!" gasped the Frenchman, in a violent hurry. "Young man drowned near the Établissement des

Bains. Supposed to have committed suicide. Strange woman with black veil weeping over his corpse. Came too late to see it myself, but heard the tale from the old bathing-woman who sleeps down there, and who was awakened by the noise."

"Did you hear his name?" asked Ravoli, eagerly.

"No; couldn't find it out. Off to the office to do a paragraph and promise 'full details to-morrow.' No use going down there," he added, as the Baron was about to start off towards the beach. "Everybody gone away, and all quiet again."

"Do you, at least, know where they carried the body to?"

"Had no time to inquire," shouted the journalist, who was already panting off again towards the office. "Can't stop to talk any more, or those fellows of the *Saison* will get the story first. *Au revoir!*"

Ravoli's resolution was instantly taken.

He felt convinced that the young man alluded to was Lascelles, and the veiled woman Ellen Barclay; but on the details of the story he could place no reliance, and it was impossible to remain in this state of uncertainty and suspense.

Reckless of consequences, he hurried to the Place Masséna, and, taking a *fiacre* there, drove straight to Mrs. Barclay's house. But the footman who answered his knock had received his instructions, and steadily asseverated that his mistress had not returned from her journey. The stillness of the house seemed to bear out the truth of his assertion that she was not there, and, after a moment's reflection, the Baron re-entered the *fiacre* and drove to the Grand Hôtel. Here he learnt that Captain Lascelles had left the hotel shortly after six o'clock, on foot, and had not yet returned. The Marchese and Major Douglas had driven from the door a few minutes ago, said the porter, and he

had heard the latter order the coachman to take them to the Cercle Masséna.

Ravoli did not wait for another word. He paid and discharged his driver, and proceeded on foot to the club.

It was barely ten o'clock when the Baron reached the Cercle. A couple of quiet rubbers were going on in the *salle de jeu*, but the baccarat table was as yet unoccupied, and most of the members present, including Commodore Halden, Gabrella, Onofrio Mariani, and De Clère, were sitting round the fire in the smoking-room. Conspicuous as the central figure of the group stood Major Douglas. He was leaning his back against the mantel-piece, and glanced frequently and anxiously at the door. A dangerous gleam shot from his deeply sunken grey eyes as the Baron entered the room, but Ravoli did not notice it. He walked smiling up to the Major, and was about to speak, but the words froze on his lips as Kenneth, waving aside

his outstretched hand, folded his arms across his broad chest, and, drawing himself up to his full height, looked down at the Italian with an air of withering contempt.

Ravoli's heart sank within him. He had always instinctively hated and feared Douglas, and this open declaration of hostility filled him with a nameless and sickening terror. Every eye was fixed on him, and the insult was so direct and public that it was impossible to pretend to ignore it.

"Major Douglas," he said, in a voice which he vainly endeavoured to render steady, "I think you cannot have noticed that I am offering you my hand."

In an instant all conversation was hushed, and every man held his breath in astonished expectation. Each gazed in startled surprise at his neighbour, and then every look was turned towards the Major.

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Baron," replied Kenneth; "I see perfectly well that you are

offering me your hand, but I distinctly refuse to take it."

He spoke in clear, distinct tones, and the Italian started and winced as from the cutting lash of a horsewhip.

"And may I beg that you will state your reasons for doing so?" he muttered, hoarsely.

"Certainly," answered Douglas, slightly raising his voice, but still speaking with deliberate and emphatic slowness. "I have hitherto tolerated your society because I was ignorant of your real character. I have this evening learnt, on the best authority, that you are nothing but a blackleg and a *chevalier d'industrie*; and, as such, I decline your acquaintance for the future."

Ravoli was not brave, but the Major's tone and words would have stirred the blood of the veriest coward living. His swarthy face flushed scarlet to the temples, and for a moment he met Kenneth's gaze unflinchingly.

"I will not condescend to inquire from

what calumnious source you may have derived your pretended information, Major Douglas," he replied, with desperate calmness. "Permit me, however, to express my astonishment that as an intimate friend of Captain Lascelles, a notorious—"

Ravoli never finished that sentence. Swift and straight as a stone flung from a catapult, Kenneth's fist shot out from the shoulder, and struck the Italian full on the mouth. He staggered back a couple of paces, stumbled over a chair, and came heavily to the ground.

A moment of silent stupefaction ensued. Then De Clère and an American naval officer sprang forward and raised the fallen man from the ground. The blood was streaming fast from his mouth and nostrils as they placed him in a chair. He was choking, and gasped hoarsely and furiously in his vain attempts to speak. He rolled his bloodshot eyes wildly, and grasped De Clère's arm with one hand, while with the other he

pointed to Douglas, who had quietly resumed his nonchalant attitude.

"Arrange—all—instantly!" he at last succeeded in muttering indistinctly.

"Do you mean that you wish me to act as your second?" inquired De Clère, in his usual quiet and passionless voice.

Ravoli nodded a vehement assent.

"Very well," replied the Frenchman; "I must see you home first, and then I will settle everything immediately. Will you be kind enough to refer me to one of your friends, Monsieur le Major?"

"The Marquis will await you at the Grand Hôtel, in half-an-hour, if that will suit your convenience, Monsieur De Clère," answered Kenneth, courteously.

"That was a magnificent left-hander, Major," said the old French Duke, as Douglas passed his wheel-chair to leave the room with Gabrella. "I saw many a tough prize-fight in my youth, when I was an

émigré in England, and am rather a good judge of a fair knock-down blow. But why did you damage the poor devil's lips instead of letting him have it between the eyes?"

Douglas smiled.

"Because if I had he would not have been able to see out of them to-morrow morning, Monsieur le Duc; even supposing I had not killed him on the spot, which would have led to some unpleasantness. We shall probably fight *à la barrière*, and it would have been hardly fair to deprive him of his eyesight."

"Parbleu," exclaimed the old nobleman, his pallid face flushing with honest admiration, "c'est une idée de gentilhomme. Donnez-moi la main; vous êtes un brave."

In less than an hour Monsieur De Clère and the American officer who had assisted him in raising the fallen adventurer, presented themselves at the Grand Hôtel. They were received by the Marchese Di Gabrella

and by Monsieur Randon, a short, fat Frenchman, with bristly grey hair and round eyes, whose naturally good-humoured and jovial expression struggled almost comically with the air of dignity and importance which he had seen fit to assume on this solemn occasion.

Monsieur Randon, or *le gros Randon*, as his friends disrespectfully termed him, was quite a character at Nice. For many years he had followed the honourable and lucrative, but essentially peaceful, calling of a notary in the Rue St. François de Paule, when, at the age of forty-five, he unexpectedly inherited a large fortune from a distant relative. Casting his dusty legal parchments and his professional white ties to the winds, Monsieur Randon now suddenly made his appearance in the character of a man of fashion.

Animated apparently by a resolution to make up for lost time, he plunged headlong, and with all the ardour of a youth, into the

gaeties of Nice society; where the regularity with which he lost (and paid) his ten-franc points at whist, and the good-natured gallantry which he displayed in rescuing forlorn, elderly damsels from the unenviable fate of wall-flowers, soon achieved for him a considerable measure of popularity. Amid the mild enjoyments of this easy existence Monsieur Randon would, probably, have lived his allotted term of years, had not an unkind fate caused him to meet, at a club ball, a most fascinating Irish widow, of doubtful reputation and very limited fortune. With this fair syren the good man fell instantaneously and desperately in love; and, in spite of the many warnings of his friends, the marriage of Alfred Randon, *ex-notaire, de Nice*, and of Louisa O'Driscoll, *née O'Kelly*, of Ballycoran, Tipperary, was celebrated at the *mairie*, and subsequently at the church of St. François de Paule, within six weeks from the date of their first

acquaintance. For a few months all went on smoothly in the new *ménage*; but the croakers soon had their revenge. One afternoon Madame Randon drove alone from her husband's door to the railway station, and in a few hours it was publicly known that she had eloped with a half-pay captain and a large quantity of valuable jewellery, the gift of her loving and too confiding husband.

Long and loud was the laughter in which his good friends now indulged at the expense of *ce gros Randon*, and louder still rose the peals of merriment when they learnt that he had started off in hot pursuit of the fugitive couple. For three days no tidings of the pursuer or the pursued reached Nice. Then, from Florence, there came strange rumours. Randon had overtaken his runaway wife, and had called out the ravisher! He had been killed! The captain had been killed! They had both been wounded! They had both fired in the air! For twenty-four

hours at least a dozen different versions were circulated, until the re-appearance of Randon himself put an end to all uncertainty. He had caught the guilty couple at Florence; had horse-whipped the captain in the street; had fought him on the following morning, with only one pistol loaded, at three paces; and, chance having for once favoured the injured one and caused his adversary to choose the wrong weapon, had shot him through the heart.

Randon never saw his wife again. He generously settled a small annuity on her, and quietly resumed the even tenor of his bachelor existence. But greatness was thrust upon him; his reputation as a determined duellist was thoroughly established, and twice within six months he was called upon to officiate as second in an affair of honour. By degrees the taste grew on him, and he acquired a positive mania for duelling. He studied the *Code du Duel*, by the Comte de

Châteauvillard, assiduously, and knew the *Essai sur le Jugement de Dieu*, by François de Brézé, by heart. He made a journey to Paris for the express purpose of being introduced to the Marquis du Hallé, the most famous of modern *spadassins*. He dined with Gramont-Caderousse, lent money to Paul de Cassagnac, and was at last rewarded for his unwearied exertions by being regarded as one of the greatest living authorities on all matters appertaining to the procedure and etiquette of single combat, with sword, sabre, or pistol.

“I shall ask him to act with me, Major,” had said the Marchese, “because he is perfectly *au fait* of all the minutiae of duelling, and never asks any indiscreet questions about the origin of a quarrel when it seems to lie below the surface.”

The preliminaries were soon settled. Raveli, having received a blow, was, according to rule, entitled to the choice of arms ; but in

the present instance that privilege became quite illusory ; the insult had been far too gross and too public to admit of reparation by any but the deadliest mode of combat. It was agreed that the encounter should take place on the following morning, and that the adversaries should fight *à la barrière*, with *pistolets de précision*, of which Monsieur Randon volunteered to furnish two pairs from his well-stocked arsenal of duelling weapons. They were to be placed back to back, and wheel round at a given signal, after which each of them could advance ten paces and fire at will. In case the first discharge proved ineffectual, the second pair of pistols would be brought into requisition ; but this, as Randon remarked with a cheerful smile, was a very unlikely contingency.

These arrangements were not effected without a short discussion. Ravoli, with a lively remembrance of the terrible skill displayed by the Major in the shooting

gallery at Monte Carlo, had instructed his seconds to demand the combat at three paces, with only one pistol loaded; which would have left the issue of the encounter to mere hazard, and have secured to him, at least, an even chance for his life. But the Marchese absolutely refused to assent to such conditions, and Monsieur Randon quoted half-a-dozen authorities to prove the utter inadmissibility of the Baron's claim.

"You may, perhaps, object to this that I was once myself a principal in a duel of a similar kind," he said; "but the circumstances of the case were totally different. I was then (and, in spite of assiduous practice, have always remained) a very poor shot; whereas, my opponent was a *tireur de première force*; and, even then, I could not have insisted on the conditions if he had not freely accepted them. We have now to deal with two gentlemen renowned for their skill in the use of arms, and there

exists no reason whatever for departing from the ordinary rules. If the Baron de Ravoli persists in what I must, under the circumstances, describe as a perfectly groundless and unwarrantable claim, we shall simply withdraw our man, and leave your principal to seek satisfaction in any other way he may choose."

The position was clearly untenable. After a brief consultation with his colleague, Monsieur De Clère gave up the disputed point. A few minor details were then discussed; the place and hour of the hostile meeting were agreed upon, and the four gentlemen gravely and ceremoniously separated.

"It is all settled, Major," said the Marchese, as he entered Kenneth's room.

"For to-morrow morning!" inquired Douglas.

Gabrella nodded assent.

"*A la barrière?*"

"Yes."

“Thirty paces?”

“Thirty paces; back to back; wheel at signal; advance ten paces; fire at will,” answered Gabrella, succinctly.

“That is all right,” replied Douglas, quietly replacing his pipe between his teeth.

“And now, will you explain your plan to me?” asked the Marchese; “for I must confess that I am quite at a loss to understand what good you expect to do Captain Lascelles by shooting that scoundrel of a countryman of mine, or by getting yourself shot by him.”

“Wait until to-morrow morning, and you will see,” answered Douglas, rather abruptly. “It would be no use to explain it to you now, as you would, probably, only waste your breath in vain endeavours to dissuade me from it.”

The two men had been acquainted but forty-eight hours; but each had at once recognized in the other a strong and kindred

nature; and the singular circumstances under which they had been thrown together had, in two short days, ripened their acquaintance into a degree of intimacy which years of ordinary friendship often fail to produce. The Marchese took no offence at Kenneth's *brusquerie*, but calmly lighted a cigarette, and smoked for a few moments in silence.

"Have you any instructions to give me," he asked, presently, "in case anything should happen to you?"

"None whatever, *mon cher ami*," answered Kenneth, laughing, "because nothing *will* happen to me."

"Do not be too sure of that, Major," rejoined Gabrella, gravely. "I hear that Ravoli shoots quickly and well."

Douglas laid his hand on the Sicilian's shoulder.

"Mark my words," he said, impressively; "in a few hours I shall be standing by your

side, safe and sound, as I am at this instant, and Ravoli will be lying dead at our feet with a bullet through his brain, unless—”

He checked himself suddenly.

“*A demain*, Marquis” he added; “it is now midnight, and we must be up at five. For the sake of straight powder to-morrow you must let me get a little sleep.”

The Marquis took the hint, and, wishing the Major good-night, retired to his own room.

Half-an-hour later, a note from Monsieur Claude was brought to Kenneth. It only contained three lines:—

“L. still in the house. No signs of intended removal. Nothing to report. Have heard result of your visit to the Cercle Masséna, and shall await your return to-morrow at the Grand Hôtel.”

CHAPTER X.

THE ALTERNATIVE.

La ruse la mieux ourdie
Peut nuire à son inventeur ;
Et souvent la perfidie
Retourne sur son auteur.

LAFONTAINE.

ABOUT three miles beyond Monaco the road to Mentone passes over a small, rocky hill, from the summit of which the barren, stony ground slopes abruptly down to the sea. Half-way down the descent a huge land-slip, which occurred more than a century ago, has left a sort of natural terrace, nearly two hundred yards long, and over fifty feet broad. The spot is almost as wild and deserted as any that could be found even amid the granite fastnesses of the Alps. The distant roof of a miserable wayside inn is the only object in the landscape suggestive of human life on the

shore. The white sails of an occasional coasting felucca glide smoothly over the blue waters below, and the faintly-heard song of the sailors, or the hoarse cry of the circling sea-gull overhead, alone disturbs the prevailing silence. The loneliness of this spot, and the close vicinity of the Italian frontier, which afforded a safe refuge after any encounter attended with serious or fatal consequences, had long rendered it a favourite rendezvous for duellists; and when the landlord of the wretched *auberge* saw two carriages drive rapidly past his door, at seven o'clock in the morning, and stop near the summit of the hill, he was not long in guessing on what errand the occupants were bound. Shading his eyes with his hands he peered eagerly at the seven men who alighted, and his face brightened as he noticed that one of the party, a stout, grey-haired man, carried in his hand a flat, oblong box in a brown leather case.

“A duel with pistols, and *le gros Randon* as one of the seconds,” he muttered, joyfully. “*A la bonne heure!* Some chance of serious work, and of a customer for us, this time! Those miserable *petits-crevés* who come here, to prick each other in the arm with swords, are not worth the bit of sticking-plaster that covers their scratches. Put sheets on the best bed, Marie,” he continued, calling to his wife who was inside the house superintending the kitchen arrangements, “and get some hot water ready. We may have a good customer within half an hour.”

Devoutly praying that some well-directed bullet might speedily send him an occupant for the aforesaid best bed, mine host hurried down to the terrace by a short cut, and ensconced himself in some low bushes whence he could enjoy an uninterrupted view of the approaching encounter.

The two carriages having driven up at the same moment, the principals and their seconds

exchanged a ceremonious bow on alighting, and then wended their way down the steep path that led to the terrace; Douglas, Gabrella, and Randon being slightly in advance of the others.

"For God's sake fire instantly on the signal, Major," said the Marchese, in a low tone. "Ravoli looks perfectly cool, and you know that he has never missed his man yet. But they say that he requires three or four seconds to make sure of his aim; and, from what I have heard of your extraordinary quickness, I should think that you ought to be able to send your bullet through his heart before he has time to draw the trigger."

"Monsieur le Marquis is perfectly right," remarked Randon, in a quiet business-like tone, carefully smoothing down his black satin cravat with his black-gloved hand. "I was second to Count Zamoyski in his duel with the Baron De Ravoli, two years ago. On that occasion my principal missed his aim,

and the Baron, firing exactly four seconds after the signal, shot him through the brain. I took the time by a stop-watch, as I invariably do, in order to enter the details correctly in my diary."

Kenneth smiled with perfect self-confidence.

"Pray, do not make yourselves at all uneasy about me," he replied. "I have my plan. Ravoli certainly shows a bold front; but I am sure that his assumed coolness is nothing but empty bravado, and that he is an arrant coward at heart. He happens to have seen me shoot before, and knows what my 'form' is. When I stand opposite him, pistol in hand, you may be very sure that his own hand will not be as steady as it is in the shooting-gallery."

The whole party had now reached the spot selected for the meeting. Ravoli was accompanied by his two seconds and a surgeon. The Baron certainly possessed one great aid to coolness of demeanour; he had what the

French call *l'habitude du terrain*. It often happens that the same man who has proved his valour on many a battle-field, appears to his disadvantage on the "grass before breakfast." The novelty of the position and the chilling cold-bloodedness of the whole proceedings are a sore trial to the nerves of the tyro. He may not be afraid of his adversary's bullet, but he can hardly help being *afraid of appearing afraid*, and is thus frequently betrayed into an affectation of indifference, closely resembling the swagger under which a coward will often try to cloak his inward terror. Ravoli was no novice in duelling. He had been "out" several times, and even his enemies had always believed in his cool courage and unshaken nerves. But the present occasion differed widely from any of his past experiences. He had hitherto been accustomed to combine prudence with valour, and among his former opponents there had not been a single one who was not

greatly his inferior in the use of the sword or the pistol. He had, in fact, always played the grim game of life and death with loaded dice, and was now, for the first time, opposed to an antagonist whose undoubted superiority decidedly reversed the usual odds. In spite of this, he kept his countenance admirably. He was rather pale, but that might well be attributed to the efforts of the fearful blow that he had received, and of which his cut and swollen lips bore clear traces. As he stood slightly apart from the others, quietly smoking a cigarette, it would have required a keen eye to detect the occasional and almost imperceptible twitching of the eyelid which alone betrayed his well-concealed uneasiness.

Only once, when he caught Gabrella's eye, he winced visibly, and muttered, between his clenched teeth,—

"Il mal' occhio! Curse him, what is he looking at me for?"

The preliminary arrangements were quickly

made. With military precision, Monsieur Randon measured out a distance of thirty paces, each extremity of which was marked by a walking-stick placed upright in the sandy soil. The intervening space was then divided into three equal portions by two handkerchiefs, which were placed on the ground, each at ten paces from one of the sticks. Meanwhile, Monsieur De Clère and the Marchese had carefully loaded the pistols, the exact amount of the charge being regulated to a grain. Business was meant in stern and bitter earnest, and this was no case for overloading the weapons, as is often done in less serious encounters, in order that they may carry high, and send the bullets harmlessly whistling overhead. The opponents were then conducted to their respective posts, and placed back to back. As Monsieur De Clère handed Ravoli his weapon, he noticed that his hand shook, and that he was ashy pale.

It had been arranged that Randon should

give the signal. He took his place between the two principals, about ten yards to the right of Kenneth's line of fire.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a loud, clear voice, "I shall give the signal by pronouncing the four words, '*One! Two! Three! Fire!*' On the last word you will wheel round and fire at will, as you advance towards the two handkerchiefs. If the first firer misses his aim, the other gentleman will be at liberty to complete his ten paces before returning the fire, which, however, he shall be bound to do within a period of one minute, under penalty of forfeiting his shot. Should the first exchange of bullets lead to no satisfactory result, you will be furnished with the two remaining pistols. Gentlemen, make ready. *One!—Two!—Three!—Fire!*"

During the whole of Monsieur Randon's little speech, which had been pronounced with the most provoking coolness and deliberation, the two men had stood back to

back, motionless as two sable statues, each with his right arm pressed tightly against his chest, and the muzzle of his pistol pointing straight upwards. At the word "*Fire!*" they wheeled round with practised swiftness; but, even in that rapid movement, Douglas gained a fraction of a second on his adversary, and, before Ravoli could get a correct aim, he saw the deadly tube, unswerving and immovable as the surrounding rocks, pointed full at his head. In an instant the memory of the scene at the *Tir au Pistolet* flashed with blinding distinctness across his brain. His nerve was gone! He could not even control his gaze, which, for one brief moment, wandered from his pistol to meet the deadly *mal' occhio* steadily fixed on him. A mist swam before his eyes. The cold sweat of terror broke forth on his forehead, and wildly, at a venture, he drew the trigger.

With a scornful laugh, Kenneth lowered

his pistol, and quickly advanced five paces.

"Twenty-five paces, Ravoli," he exclaimed; "you know what I can do at that distance. Say that you will confess the whole plot, or my bullet goes crashing through your forehead. You have about fifteen seconds to make up your mind."

Kenneth's voice rang on the Baron's ears stern and awful as the trumpet of the Last Judgment. Life or death trembled in the balance. For one fleeting instant all that was left of the gentleman in that debased and blackened heart rose against the frightful humiliation. He would die—die mutely and bravely! But the deadly weapon had again been raised. In another second the bullet would have pierced his brain. His craven nature failed him, and his discharged pistol dropped from his nerveless hand.

"*J'avoueraï tout !*" he shrieked, in a wild burst of terror.

There was a fearful pause. Then his overstrained nerves gave way utterly. He staggered, and crashed heavily forwards on his face in a dead swoon.

The surgeon rushed forward, and raised his head from the ground.

"*Ça ne sera rien,*" he said ; " he has only fainted."

For the first and only time in his life De Clère completely lost his habitual *sang-froid*. For a few moments he stood as if struck dumb with horror. Then he hastily strode up to Kenneth, who had handed his pistol to Gabrella, and was gazing with an expression of unspeakable scorn at the prostrate form of his opponent, and held out his ungloved hand.

"Major Douglas," he said, in a voice tremulous with deep emotion, "I do not yet understand what mystery is hidden under

this most strange and distressing scene ; but the few words which have been spoken clearly prove that the Baron De Ravoli has been implicated in some foul conspiracy. If, as I hope, his confessions should tend to establish Captain Lascelles's innocence, I beg to declare beforehand that nobody will be more sincerely overjoyed than myself, and that I shall place myself unreservedly at his orders if he declines to be satisfied with the expression of my profound regret for all that has passed between us. Pardon me one minute," he added, hastily, as Kenneth was about to speak ; " whatever may be the result of the revelations promised, I must at once apologize to *you*, publicly and formally, for my part in bringing a brave man like yourself face to face with that cowardly scoundrel. In saying this I am sure that I express my colleague's sentiments as well as my own."

The American bowed his acquiescence.

"You owe me no apology, De Clère," answered Douglas, warmly grasping the Frenchman's hand. "Like Lascelles himself, you have been the victim of a deep-laid and damnable conspiracy. You have acted throughout the whole affair the part of a perfect gentleman, and I shall be proud to claim you as a friend. I now ask of you, as a favour, to listen with us to that man's confession."

De Clère instantly assented to this proposal. The surgeon had now succeeded in restoring the Italian to consciousness. The landlord of the inn had joined the party, unobserved amid the general excitement, and now proceeded to lead the way to that unsavoury establishment, whither they had agreed to adjourn. The whole party slowly re-ascended the steep path in Indian file, the rear being brought up by Randon, who had re-packed his *pistolets de précision* with a very dissatisfied air, and was overheard to

grumble audibly at the whole proceedings as being "quite irregular, and entirely without precedent."

The distance was short, and the Italian had but scant time to collect his scattered thoughts. But Ravoli had seen too many ups-and-downs, in the course of his adventurous career, to be long in taking a decision; and his shameless cynicism now served him well. Mingled with the consciousness of the utter collapse of all his plans, was a sense of sheer physical relief at his escape from the death which had come so terribly near him. His busy brain was already actively at work, and at a single glance he reviewed all his present chances. Reticence was clearly useless. That there had been a traitor in the camp and that Alphonse was that traitor he had quickly divined; but Alphonse could have furnished only very incomplete information. *He* alone was in a position to reveal the whole history

of the conspiracy, and to unveil the hidden motives of the various actors in the plot. Such details must undoubtedly be of great value to the adverse party, and his only chance of securing comparatively favourable terms for himself lay in making a clean breast of the whole affair and trusting entirely to Douglas's generosity.

The seven men entered the inn. Declining the various refreshments proffered by the host, Douglas desired him to show them into a private room, where they would be secure from interruption. The landlord accordingly ushered them into a sort of comfortless and stone-floored coffee-room, of which a deal table and a few wooden chairs formed the sole furniture. Here, by Kenneth's directions, he brought paper, pens, and ink; and, having closed the doors, left his strange guests to transact their mysterious business.

There was but one small window in the

room. The Baron immediately took his place with his back to the light, and stood with folded arms leaning against the shutters, his face being thus partly in the shade. Douglas sat down at the table, and drew a sheet of paper towards him. He dipped his pen in the ink and looked up at Ravoli.

"If you will be good enough to make your statement now, Monsieur le Baron," he said, in cold, but polite tones, "I shall be obliged to you. It is scarcely necessary to remind you that, in your own interest, it will be well to make it as complete as possible."

The hint was enough. Ravoli was well up in the laws, and knew that it only rested with the Major to give him at once into custody on a criminal charge of conspiracy. His schemes were defeated beyond all hope of retrieval, and only by turning King's evidence against his fellow-conspirators could he hope to escape retribution. Slowly,

minutely, and without suppressing or distorting a single detail, he related the entire history of the plot against Lascelles. The Emperor's arrival in Nice as Mrs. Barclay's agent; his application to the Baron for assistance in carrying out his orders; his own hopes of eventually securing Miss Warburton's hand and fortune; Alphonse's complicity; the substitution of the marked cards; Mrs. Barclay's return from Paris and his last interview with her in his own apartments,—were all detailed with cynical and unblushing accuracy and completeness. For nearly an hour the sickening record of intrigue and villany was slowly unfolded to the horror-struck listeners, and Kenneth's swift pen flew unwearied over the paper; while around him half-suppressed execrations broke from the lips of the other hearers, as they remembered that the narrator had once been one of their own set, and had lived amongst them as an equal and a friend.

When the tale was at last concluded, Douglas again looked up.

“You have nothing to add?” he asked.

“Nothing,” replied Ravoli, sullenly. “What has become of Mrs. Barclay and of Captain Lascelles since last night I have not been able to ascertain.”

The Major rose from his chair.

“We are in possession of full information on that subject,” he remarked, drily. “Will you now have the goodness to sit down and sign that paper, after reading its contents?”

The Italian did not hesitate for a moment, but at once took up the pen.

“I am quite prepared to take it for granted that you have written down my statement correctly,” he muttered; and, seating himself at the table, he immediately signed the document, without even glancing at the pages.

At the Major's request the seconds then affixed their signatures, as witnesses, to Ravoli's confession, which Kenneth care-

fully folded up and placed in his pocket-book. He then produced a small slip of blue paper, on which he wrote a few words.

“Monsieur le Baron,” he said, gravely, addressing the Italian amid a dead silence of expectation, “you must be aware that you have laid yourself open to an indictment for conspiracy. My sole object, however, being to clear my friend’s honour, and not to seek revenge, you are safe from any legal proceedings on that score. Moreover, the information which you have *voluntarily*” (with scornful emphasis on the word) “given us, possesses undeniably considerable value. It is right that you should be rewarded for your services. Here is a cheque for one thousand pounds, of which I request your acceptance. I will only further suggest that the Italian frontier is close at hand, and warn you that it would be undesirable that we should ever meet again.”

Douglas pointed significantly to the door

as he spoke. Ravoli's face flushed slightly, but he took the cheque without a word. Shrinking from him, as from a leper, the others fell back to let him pass. Without raising his eyes he walked silently to the door, and in another moment had disappeared from the room, as he henceforth disappears from the present history.

"A good day's work, Marie," remarked the landlord, re-entering the inn after the carriages, which had just been summoned from the top of the hill, had driven from the door. "They only wanted a quire of paper, and the use of the room for an hour, and that *grand Anglais roux* slipped ten Napoleons into my hand as they left. I doubt whether even a wounded man would have brought us in more than that," he added, reflectively, "not to speak of the trouble he would have given; so, on the whole, I am just as well pleased that nobody should have been hurt, after all."

CHAPTER XI.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

For the lords in whose keeping the door is,
That opens on all who draw breath,
Gave the cypress to love, my Dolores,
The myrtle to death.

SWINBURNE.

IN a room furnished and decorated with almost regal magnificence, Walter lay still unconscious. The walls were completely hidden under fluted folds of rose-coloured satin, heavily embroidered with silver. The curiously-wrought columns of the bed were of ebony, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and ample curtains of the richest point-lace shrouded the splendid couch. An alabaster lamp, suspended from the ceiling by a silver chain, shed a soft and subdued light over the room, and its rays were flashed back in

a thousand many-tinted coruscations from the diamond cyphers of the marvellous gold toilet-set which covered the luxurious dressing-table.

By the bed-side stood Mona, Mrs. Barclay's mulatto maid, and an old negro valet, whose snow-white hair contrasted strangely with the jetty blackness of his wrinkled skin. He was silently engaged in applying soft handkerchiefs, soaked in water, to the deep cut in Walter's forehead, while Mona held a bottle of aromatic vinegar to his nostrils. The wound was still bleeding freely, and the sheets and pillow-case were marked with broad crimson stains. As the swarthy attendants moved to and fro, their footsteps fell noiselessly on the thickly-quilted carpet. They did not exchange a single word, and this dead stillness still further heightened the weird strangeness of the scene.

Suddenly Lascelles stirred slightly, and,

with a heavy sigh, opened his eyes. For a few seconds he lay motionless, vainly endeavouring to collect his confused ideas; but his memory, benumbed by the severe shock that he had received, was still dormant. Instinctively he tried to raise his head and look round him; but, as he moved, a pang of intense agony shot through his temples, and, with a faint cry of pain, he sank back insensible on the pillows.

At this moment a door was softly opened, the heavy silken *portière* was pushed aside, and Mrs. Barclay, followed by a doctor, entered the room, and hastily approached the bed.

The physician, a grave and benevolent-looking old man, removed the improvised bandage of wet handkerchiefs from Walter's forehead. He then asked for a sponge and a basin of warm water, and gently washed away the blood from the cut, which he examined silently and attentively.

"This injury is of no great importance," he said at last, "and is certainly not of a nature to cause us any uneasiness whatever. It is a clean, deep cut; but the frontal bone is quite intact."

"Then you do not think that there is any danger?" whispered Ellen, who, with clasped hands, had intently watched every movement and every look.

"Pardon me, madame," replied the physician; "I cannot yet take upon myself to say that there is *no* danger. The skin is burning, and fever appears to be rapidly setting in. I will answer your question after a more minute examination."

With a couple of handkerchiefs torn into narrow strips, he quickly and skilfully bound up the wound. While he was thus occupied, Lascelles again opened his eyes. They were unnaturally bright, and, although he looked hard at Ellen, and she addressed him by his name, he did not seem to recognize

her, and only muttered a few broken and incoherent words.

The doctor felt his pulse, and then took from a morocco case a small pocket thermometer, which he held under the wounded man's armpit.

"Forty degrees Centigrade," he said, as he examined the instrument. "High fever and incipient delirium. I confess that I am puzzled. It is very strange that an immersion of a few minutes in cold water, and a blow which, though severe, has left the brain uninjured, should have developed such symptoms in so healthy and strongly-built a patient; unless, indeed, he happened at the moment of the occurrence to be already labouring under the influence of some strong mental excitement. Perhaps, Madame, you can enlighten me on that subject."

Ellen made no answer to this question. Pale and trembling, she laid her hand on his arm, and with an intense searching look, as

though she would have penetrated the secrets of his inmost thoughts,—

“Do not deceive me,” doctor, she said. “If you think that he is in serious danger, tell me so at once.”

“You are now rushing into the opposite extreme, and are entirely misinterpreting the meaning of my words,” he replied, earnestly. “I cannot go so far as to say that there is *no* danger; but we have every reason to hope for the best.”

“Then save him, save him!” she exclaimed, passionately. “If human skill be of any avail, for God’s sake save his life! I am rich, very rich! Name any sum, however large; and if you can but save him, it shall be yours, and I will thank and bless you on my bended knees!”

A terrible agitation shook her whole frame as she clung convulsively and imploringly to his arm.

“Believe me, dear Madame,” answered

the good man, kindly, evidently much affected by her vehement appeal, "I require no bribe to induce me to do my duty to the best of my ability; nor is there any immediate cause for alarm. Although the symptoms present an unusual character of intensity, the patient is young and vigorous, and the strength of his constitution will doubtless carry him through the sharp attack of fever which is certainly now impending. You are yourself quite as ill as he is," he added, taking her burning hand in his; "and, if you follow my advice, you will at once retire to bed, and take a composing draught which I will prescribe for you. I intend myself to spend the night in this room."

Ellen eagerly accepted the physician's proposal to stay at Walter's bed-side during the night, but absolutely refused to leave the room herself. Finding that all his exhortations were fruitless, and only served to increase her agitation, the doctor at last

consented to let her share his watch. He wrote the necessary prescriptions, and the negro valet, who was deaf and dumb, and to whom Ellen spoke on her fingers, was despatched to fetch all that was required.

The night was a fearful one.

Since he had last opened his eyes, Lascelles had not ceased tossing restlessly from side to side and muttering rapidly and excitedly. The fever now increased with appalling swiftness, and in less than an hour he was raving in the paroxysms of the wildest delirium. In mad and bewildering confusion the memories of every scene of his past life seemed to be hurrying through his disordered brain. He was threading his way through the mazes of the Indian jungle, and the scorching rays of the sun pierced the dense foliage and beat fiercely on his aching head. He had lost his companions, and was wandering alone through the trackless forest. Strange and noisome reptiles rustled and

hissed across his path, and from each surrounding bush the deadly cobra capella reared its menacing crest and darted its forked tongue. A crash—a roar—and he was struggling in the claws of an infuriated tiger! The hot, reeking breath of the monster was on his face, and the white glistening fangs were at his throat! The foam flew from his parched and blackened lips as he writhed in frightful convulsions and shouted frantically for help! Anon, he was strolling quietly with his cousin in the garden of the peaceful vicarage, where he had first known and loved her. In low and tender accents he rehearsed every outpouring of ardent affection, every sweet vow of plighted love; and Clara's name, murmured in the softest tones of endearment, smote Ellen's ear like drops of liquid fire rained down on her heart. A pause, and he was playing *écarté* with De Clère; playing wildly and despairingly, with a vague con-

sciousness that he must lose for ever. With feverish eagerness he plunged yet more deeply into ruin! The cards were on fire and burnt his hands! The flames of hell shot up around him! De Clère had disappeared, and he was playing with the fiend himself—his own soul the stake of the game! He had lost! With a hollow groan he cowered down trembling and hid his white face in his hands. Then a mad, ringing laugh burst from his lips, and he began to hum snatches of the *Morgenblätter waltz*. He was dancing with Ellen Barclay; her cheek was laid on his shoulder, and the perfume of her hair intoxicated his senses! They had left the earth together, and were gliding among golden clouds to the sounds of celestial harmony. Suddenly the clouds grew black! A terrific peal of thunder rent the air! Blue and livid, the lightning flashes played around them! Louder and louder swelled the music, until it burst into

an unearthly chorus, like the cries and yells of tortured spirits! His partner's grasp tightened on his shoulder; he glanced at her! The flesh was dropping from her bones, and he was being helplessly whirled through the Dance of Death in the iron grip of a grisly skeleton. He struggled furiously to disengage himself, and, with an awful shriek of agony, fell back exhausted and apparently dead!

A period of utter prostration succeeded this last and most fearful crisis, and so deep was the lethargy that the physician felt anxiously for Walter's pulse, uncertain for a moment whether life itself had not departed amid the dreadful throes of that supreme convulsion. But, although he now lay motionless and corpse-like, Lascelles had survived the terrible crisis. His breathing gradually became faintly audible, and he sank into a profound and death-like sleep.

"The worst is, I hope, over," whispered

the doctor to Mrs. Barclay, who had not once stirred from his side during that long night of agony. "We have fortunately escaped the danger of brain-fever, a most perilous complication, which I greatly feared. He will sleep long, perhaps for twenty-four hours. When he awakes, he will certainly be weak and exhausted, but probably free from fever, and, as far as human foresight can anticipate, out of all danger."

It was now nearly seven o'clock in the morning. Ellen had not tasted food since she had left Marseilles early on the previous day, and into that brief space had been compressed the mental emotions of a whole ordinary lifetime. She had passed from the sickening suspense of trembling hope to the wild exultation of a guilty and fearful joy, only to be again overwhelmed by the anguish of terror and heart-rending remorse. Pale and tearless, she had stood for hours beside the couch on which he for whom she

had plotted and sinned lay hovering between life and death. Still, throughout this terrible ordeal, the febrile excitement of the struggle and the intense fixity of her purpose had hitherto sustained her. But human endurance has its limits, and, even as the physician spoke, her over-strained energies at last broke down. She tried to speak, but her dry lips refused to utter the syllables. Her head sank on her breast, and she would have fallen to the ground if Mona had not instantly caught her nerveless form in her arms.

Even then, by a powerful effort of will, she preserved her consciousness. She pointed to her lips, and, by the doctor's orders, the negro valet quickly brought a glass of wine, which, with much difficulty, she contrived to swallow. A faint colour returned to her cheeks, and she waved her hand in impatient refusal of the physician's urgent recommendation that she should now allow herself

to be carried into another room, and take a few hours of much-needed repose.

"Mona will arrange a sofa for me near the bed," she murmured, faintly, "and I can rest here."

Any opposition to her wishes would have been quite unavailing, and the doctor, therefore, unwillingly consented to the arrangement. After once more examining Lascelles, who was sleeping profoundly, he gave directions that the room should be kept as quiet as possible, and took his leave, promising to return at eleven o'clock, and ordering Mona to send for him instantly if, by any improbable chance, the sleeper should happen to awake before that hour.

The morning had now dawned, and the sun had risen bright and joyous in the cloudless sky; but the shutters and curtains of the sick-room still remained carefully closed, and the low-burning flame of the alabaster lamp alone illumined that silent chamber.

Ellen had allowed her maid to divest her of her travelling apparel, and to attire her in an ample dressing-gown of dark blue cachemire, braided with silver. Thus arrayed, she now lay at full length on a sofa which had been wheeled close up to Walter's bedside. One of his hands lay listlessly on the coverlet; she had gently clasped it in hers, and held it softly pressed to her cheek. Her other hand was thrown above her head, and the wide, falling sleeve clearly revealed the warm, delicate flesh-tints, and the exquisite purity of outline of her wondrously-shaped arm. The heavy masses of her dark hair fell in unbound profusion over her shoulders, and a smile of almost heavenly felicity played round her parted lips. Exhausted nature had at last claimed its due, and she slept a tranquil and dreamless sleep.

She had been slumbering for more than three hours when Mona, who was keeping watch in the adjoining room, entered softly

and with infinite precaution. Light as was the foot-fall, Ellen was instantly aroused by it, and she started up on her couch with a look of eager inquiry.

“What is it, Mona?” she whispered.

The mulatto maid held in her hand a card, which she presented to her mistress.

“François obeyed your orders, ma’am,” she said, in a low voice; “and for a long time positively denied that you were here; but the gentleman would take no refusal. He said he *knew* that you had returned; and, as he declared that the business on which he desired to see you was of the greatest importance to yourself, François at last came to consult me, and I thought it best to bring you the card.”

Mrs. Barclay glanced at it. It was the Major’s. Under his name the following words had been hastily written in pencil,—

“I have been informed of your return by the *Baron De Ravoli*. For your own

sake I earnestly beg you to receive me at once."

Ellen shuddered violently as her eyes rested on these few, simple words, more dreadful to her in their implied significance than a death-warrant. Amid the fearful emotions of that terrible night she had forgotten all—forgotten her crime, forgotten the danger of delay which the Italian had so earnestly striven to impress on her mind, forgotten everything in the world excepting Walter's peril and her own passionate and all-absorbing love. As she read the two short sentences, the flood-gates of her memory were re-opened, and in an overpowering stream the pent-up torrent of fears and remembrances rushed forth and well nigh overwhelmed her soul. A ghastly and sickening terror blanched her face, but she answered in steady tones,—

"You have done quite right, Mona. Go yourself to Major Douglas, take him into

the boudoir, and tell him that I will join him there in a few minutes."

She rose as the maid left the room, and, taking a small bunch of keys which lay on the dressing-table, opened a *sac de voyage* which she had brought with her from Paris. From a secret compartment, which opened with a spring, she drew some small object, which she carefully concealed in her bosom. She hesitated for an instant, and then approached the bed on which Walter Lascelles lay asleep and motionless, and bent forward until her white lips softly touched his forehead.

"It may be the last but one, my darling," she murmured. "Even *she* would scarcely grudge me that."

Then, raising herself, she gazed for one brief moment on the sleeper's face, and, turning from his side with mechanical and automaton-like steps, went slowly forth to meet Kenneth Douglas.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST KISS.

I have passed from the outermost portal
To the shrine where a sin is a prayer.
What care though the service be mortal,
Oh, our Lady of Torture, what care ?
All thine the last wine that I pour is,
The last in the chalice I drain ;
Oh, fierce and luxurious Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain !

SWINBURNE.

ON arriving at the Grand Hôtel, after having dropped Monsieur Randon at his own door, Kenneth and Gabrella found Monsieur Claude waiting for them, according to his promise, in the Major's room. He was speedily put in possession of all the events of the morning, and Ravoli's confession was handed to him for perusal. Although he felt a slight twinge of professional envy on finding the tangled

web of the mystery so deftly unravelled by other fingers than his own, yet this striking illustration of the correctness of his favourite maxim, "*Cherchons la femme*," the memory of his own adroitness in extracting the all-important confession from Alphonse, and, last but not least, the highly liberal *douceur* that Douglas slipped into his hand, quickly smoothed down his ruffled feelings, and he heartily congratulated the Major on the successful manner in which he had carried out his bold conception.

"As for myself," he continued, "I have not much news to give you. The doctor remained in the house during the whole night; but I think it just as likely that his attendance may have been required for the lady herself as for your friend. Her face, when I caught a glimpse of it (and a wonderfully beautiful one it is), was as white as that of a corpse; and I have learnt enough of surgery, and have seen enough wounds,

to feel sure that the Captain's injury was not a dangerous one. However, I must confess," he added, with a frankness most unusual and praiseworthy in a detective, whose pride and profession it is to be omniscient, "that I have no reliable information on the subject. I certainly got one of the female servants to talk, but she knew nothing about what was going on. It seems that none of the servants are allowed to go near the room with the exception of the lady's mulatto maid and an old negro who is deaf and dumb. By-the-bye, here is a telegram which arrived for you a few minutes ago, and which I took charge of."

Kenneth hastily opened the despatch.

It was from Miss Warburton.

Confidently anticipating the success of his plan, Douglas had telegraphed to her at Lockworthy immediately after the scene at the Cercle Masséna. He had informed her that, by a strange combination of circum-

stances, Lascelles had discovered the forgery of Dr. Gaveston's name, and had, consequently, not started to follow her. He entered into no details, but begged her, if possible, to return at once to Nice. Although sorely puzzled by this strange message, and much surprised that it should not have come from Walter himself, Clara, after consulting her aunt and uncle, resolved on complying with Walter's request. She now telegraphed to say that they would leave Lockworthy (where they had found Mr. Lascelles in rapidly improving health, and much astonished at their unexpected advent) by the earliest train, and might be expected in Nice within forty-eight hours.

"And now, Marquis," said Kenneth, after Monsieur Claude, with many expressions of gratitude, had finally taken his leave, "the worst part of the business has yet to come."

"I certainly thought the worst part of it

was over when Ravoli's bullet whistled past your head without doing any damage," replied the Marchese. "Unnerved as he was, I am sure that he did not miss you by more than six inches."

"D—n the bullet!" exclaimed Kenneth, ruthlessly tugging his thick moustache. "I would rather stand the chance of half-a-dozen bullets than do the work I have before me now. I must go to Mrs. Barclay's at once."

"I certainly think that the sooner you go and get it over, the better," replied the Marchese.

"It is very easy for you to talk about it in that cool way," answered Douglas, "and of course you are quite right; but I can tell you that I should infinitely prefer riding through the Balaklava charge on a shooting-cob to forcing my way into her house on such an errand. I can generally hold my own tolerably well among men; but a

‘scene’ with a woman is entirely out of my line.”

Under his rough and uncompromising exterior, Douglas by no means lacked tenderness of heart or chivalrous feeling towards women; and, in spite of his great abhorrence of the crime of which Ellen had been guilty, he could not help feeling an uneasy consciousness that he was playing a somewhat cruel, though absolutely necessary and unavoidable part, in thus setting forth to crush this erring woman under the weight of the evidence which he had accumulated against her. He anticipated, moreover, a stormy scene of tears and sobs, and possibly of hysterics, the bare notion of which made him shudder. But he was not a man to turn away from any duty, however painful or repugnant to his own feelings. With grim determination he sallied forth on his difficult errand; and, within an hour after his return from Monte Carlo, he stood,

pale and agitated, but firm and resolute, in Ellen Barclay's boudoir.

His suspense was brief. In less than five minutes a door was opened, and Ellen appeared on the threshold. She paused for an instant before entering the room, and Douglas recoiled a step, as if he had suddenly and unexpectedly been confronted by a spectre.

The rays of the morning sun, streaming brightly through the window, fell full on her figure, and strikingly revealed her strange and unearthly pallor. Her features were as calm and rigid as if they had been chiselled in white marble. The marvellous eyes alone appeared to be still living in that colourless and death-like face, and they were rivetted on Kenneth's countenance with a terrible expression of mute, uncomplaining despair. Slowly, and with the dull, mechanical steps of a sleep-walker, she advanced to a sofa, and, inviting Douglas, by a gesture of her

hand, to be seated, waited for him to speak.

The Major remained standing, and, for a moment, silent. Tears, supplications, and every form of demonstrative grief, he had nerved himself to meet—her sobs and entreaties would have found him as hard and inflexible as adamant; but that one look of quiet and unresisting agony had cut him to the very soul, and for a few seconds he did not dare trust himself to open his lips.

He summoned up all his courage.

“I presume, Mrs. Barclay,” he said, in a low voice, “that you have already guessed the strong motives which have induced me so far to disregard the usual forms of society as to force my presence on you at such an early hour?”

She made no reply. She had averted her eyes now, and was looking intently at her hands, which were tightly clasped together on her knee. All hope was not yet quite

dead in that sinful but loving heart, and she had determined not to speak until she had learnt how much the Major knew.

"Will you not spare me the deep pain of telling you my reasons more plainly," he added, after a short pause; "and yourself the grievous humiliation of hearing them?"

Still no reply came from those pale and tightly compressed lips.

"Then, if you cannot or will not divine them," he continued, in a firmer voice, slightly irritated by her obstinate silence, "I will by one word put you on the track. I fought a duel this morning with your agent and accomplice, the Baron De Ravoli."

She looked up eagerly now.

"Did you kill him?" she asked, in a hollow whisper.

She waited breathlessly for his reply. All was not yet lost. True, the Major had spoken of Ravoli as her accomplice and agent; but these words might only repre-

sent his uncorroborated suspicions. If the Italian had died without speaking, every proof of her guilt, or at least every proof strong enough to carry conviction to Walter's mind, would be buried in his grave, and the battle which she had been on the eve of giving up as lost might yet be won at the eleventh hour.

But the faint flush of hope which had risen to her pallid cheeks died away as Kenneth's answer came, in grave and solemn tones, which rang like a death-knell on her ear.

"No, I did *not* kill him. We fought *à la barrière*. He fired first, and missed me. His life was in my hands, and I offered it to him in exchange for his confession. His cowardly heart failed him, and he spoke."

She shivered slightly, and her right hand closed convulsively on her bosom; but she uttered not a word.

“What he said is written here,” continued Douglas, drawing a folded paper from his pocket-book, “and bears his signature. I place it fearlessly in your hands. Even should you be tempted to destroy it, its destruction would not serve your purpose; for the three gentlemen who signed the document as witnesses all heard the tale from his own lips.”

He handed the paper to her as he spoke, and, turning away, walked to the window.

Slowly and steadily Mrs. Barclay perused the miserable traitor's confession. A ray of sunlight slanted across the pages, and seemed to light up each word into characters of lambent fire, which burnt her eyesight and scorched her very brain. Still, with desperate and unfaltering calmness, she read on to the very last word.

Douglas was still standing at the window, with his face averted from the sofa on which he had left Mrs. Barclay sitting, when a hand

was lightly laid on his shoulder. He turned quickly round. Ellen stood by his side; and the strong, resolute man shrank back appalled at beholding the fearful change which had come over her face. She had pushed her streaming hair wildly back from her temples, a deep red flush crimsoned her brow, an awful smile parted her lips, and the sombre fire of madness glowed fiercely in her glittering eyes.

The paper was firmly clutched in her hand, and she held it out towards him.

"Does that girl know about this yet?" she asked, in a ringing, metallic voice.

"If you mean Miss Warburton," answered Douglas, "she does *not* know of it yet; but I have this morning received a telegram from her, announcing her immediate return to Nice. It will then be difficult to conceal anything from her. Still, as I exacted from all who were present this morning an oath not to reveal what had passed without my

permission, it may be possible to avoid mentioning your participation in the sad affair, and to cast all the blame of it on the Baron De Ravoli. I will do my best to effect this, though I cannot answer for success. But, for God's sake, calm yourself, Mrs. Barclay."

She laughed a ghastly and heart-rending laugh.

"Calm myself! Yes! *He* told me to calm myself last night."

Without taking her eyes off the Major's face, she stealthily moved a step or two backwards.

"Then I suppose that you have come here to take him away from me?" she said.

As she spoke she cast a furtive, side-long glance at the door by which she had entered the room, and which had remained open.

"I have no power or authority to do so," replied Kenneth, gravely. "I am here to inform him of all that has taken place; and it will then be for him alone to decide on the

course of action which he may consider the best. He will not need my advice."

"And this you are determined to do?"

"This is a plain duty which I owe to my friend, and I am fully determined to do it," answered Douglas, firmly.

She had gradually edged away from him, and was now close to the door.

"And you wish to see him at once?"

"I came here with that intention, and trust that you will not offer any opposition to it."

"Then you shall have your wish! Follow me!"

And, with a sudden spring, she disappeared through the doorway.

A sickening foreboding of some impending tragedy curdled Kenneth's blood as he hastily followed her. The room in which he found himself was empty, but the silken folds of a curtain which masked a door were yet trembling. Hurriedly crossing the room, he raised

the *portière*, and stood transfixed with horror and surprise at the strange scene which met his gaze.

In a dimly-lighted chamber, Walter, pale and motionless as a corpse, lay on the bed before him. Ellen had flung herself madly on his insensible form, and her lips were glued to his in one last, passionate, despairing kiss. Close at hand, Mona and the negro valet stood gazing at their mistress in mute and awe-struck astonishment. It was but for a second. With a long, low, wailing cry of anguish, she suddenly rose erect, and thrust her right hand into her bosom. Then she quickly threw her head back and raised her hand to her mouth. A convulsive spasm shook her frame; a hollow, gasping sob escaped her lips; and she fell heavily across the foot of the couch.

At this moment another door was opened, and the doctor entered the room.

By a common impulse the two men sprang

forward to raise Ellen's lifeless form. As they did so, a small bottle of blue glass escaped from her relaxing fingers and rolled to the floor.

The physician instantly stooped to pick it up; but, before his hand had grasped it, the fatal odour of bitter almonds had told him but too plainly the awful truth.

"La malheureuse!" he muttered; "c'est fini—bien fini!"

CHAPTER XIII.

DE MORTUIS NIL NISI BONUM.

Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour ;
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour !

THOMAS HOOD.

A LITTLE more than a year had elapsed since Ellen Barclay's death. The sun had just risen on the sparkling waves of the Mediterranean, and its slanting rays cast a rose-coloured tinge on the sails of a splendid schooner-rigged yacht, which was rapidly approaching the harbour of Nice, under full canvas. In spite of the earliness of the hour, a party, consisting of a lady and two gentlemen, were already on the after-deck. Two of the trio, an extremely beautiful girl of about twenty, and a handsome, soldier-like

man, whose pale features bore evident traces of some recent and severe illness, were pacing up and down the poop, arm-in-arm; while the third, a man of gigantic stature, with fiery-red moustaches and whiskers, was intently scanning the shore through his telescope.

“How long will it be before we reach the harbour, Lord Kerloch?” asked the lady, pausing in her walk.

“With this breeze, which is freshening every minute, we shall be at the landing-place in less than an hour, Mrs. Lascelles,” answered the gentleman thus addressed, in whom our readers have probably already recognized Kenneth Douglas, late of Her Majesty’s —nd Regiment, and now the Right Honourable the Earl of Kerloch, in the peerage of Scotland. “I am sorry that we were detained so long by bad weather in the Bay of Biscay, for you will have but a few hours to spend on land. Your steamer leaves Mar-

seilles to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, and, in order to make sure of not missing it, we must start again from Nice not later than four o'clock this afternoon, and use the screw all the way."

"That will leave me quite enough time," said Clara.

"Quite," replied Lord Kerloch, quietly.

Clara and Walter had been married just a month; the wedding having been celebrated at Lockworthy, exactly one year after the date originally fixed at the consultation in the villa at Carabacel. His term of leave, which had been twice extended on account of his health, had expired; and they were now on their way back to India to rejoin his regiment. Kenneth, who had retired from the service on his accession to the title, at his uncle's death, had offered to take them as far as Marseilles in his yacht. This proposal had been gladly accepted; but Clara had stipulated that they should first proceed

to Nice, and remain there for one day. Lascelles had felt much surprised at her desire to return, even for a few hours, to a place the very name of which must awaken in her mind the most painful associations; but she displayed so much reluctance to answer his questions on the subject, that he had refrained from pressing her for an explanation. He was now much astonished to learn from these few words that Kenneth was acquainted with the motive of her strange desire, and his surprise betrayed itself by an involuntary glance of inquiry.

"Please ask me no questions, Walter," said Clara, in reply to his look. "I wish to go ashore for a few hours alone with Lord Kerloch. May I do so?"

Her voice was almost solemn in its subdued softness. Walter bowed his head in silent assent.

Within the promised hour the yacht lay alongside the quay. Clara and Kenneth

went on shore together ; and, as they crossed the landing-plank, Lascelles for the first time noticed that his wife was dressed entirely in black. He watched them as they crossed the quay and entered a carriage which was apparently waiting for them.

“ We shall not be long away,” Clara had said to him, just before leaving the yacht ; “ and when we return I will tell you, if you really wish it, why I asked Lord Kerloch to bring us to Nice.”

To await alone, and for an uncertain length of time, the return of a person absent for some unknown and mysterious purpose, especially when that person chances to be one's own wife, and when her return is to be followed by an explanation of the mystery, is, indeed, a sore trial of patience. To while away the time, Walter went down into the cabin, and wrote a couple of letters to his father and to Miss Lascelles, who had finally renounced the delights of foreign society, and taken up

her abode with her brother. But he was a quick writer, and in less than an hour the two missives were signed and sealed. He then took up a book, but could not succeed in fixing his attention on its contents. He threw it down and went up on deck. After restlessly taking a few turns on the poop, it suddenly occurred to him that he had three or four weeks of close confinement in prospect, and would therefore do well to avail himself of this last opportunity of taking a stroll in the country. In his present agitated frame of mind the idea of a sharp walk was doubly welcome. He looked at his watch. It was barely ten, and he had, therefore, several hours at his disposal. Calling the steward, he desired him to inform Lord Kerloch and Mrs. Lascelles, on their return, that he would be back before two o'clock; and then ordered the landing-plank to be again run out, and stepped quickly ashore.

The harbour of Nice is distant nearly a mile from the town itself, from which it is separated by a small, rocky hill, crowned by a dilapidated building known as the Vieux Château. Precipitous and inaccessible from the side nearest to the sea, it is ascended from the opposite direction by a winding carriage-road. Lascelles was well acquainted with the locality. After passing through a few narrow streets which surround the port, he struck into the open country, and began to skirt the foot of the hill, in order to gain the road which leads to the summit. The lane along which he was advancing enters the road at right angles, exactly opposite an iron gate which forms the entrance to a secluded and picturesque cemetery. Walter was within fifty yards of the spot where the path and the road meet, when a lady and a gentleman, in whom he recognized his wife and Kenneth, emerged from the burial-ground, and, entering a calèche which

stood at the gate, drove rapidly away. The *gardien*, a white-haired old man, who had accompanied them, stood for a few moments gazing at the fast-retreating carriage. Lascelles advanced quickly and accosted him.

"Pray, can you tell me who the two persons are who have just left the cemetery?" he inquired.

"I do not know their names, Monsieur," answered the old man, civilly, "but they came here to look at a grave. I think that some relative of the lady must be buried there, for she knelt and prayed at the foot of the cross for a long time."

"May I see the grave you are speaking of?" asked Lascelles, struggling hard to repress his rising emotion.

"Pourquoi pas, Monsieur? It is the prettiest grave in the whole churchyard, which is itself the prettiest in the whole *commune*," he added, with evident pride,

as he conducted Walter along a trimly-kept path, bordered by two splendid rows of cypresses. "That lady, by whose orders it was erected about a year ago, sends me a hundred francs every month to spend on the flowers; and Monsieur shall judge for himself whether I carry out her wishes conscientiously. There is the grave under that grand old willow yonder. Do not be afraid of walking on the grass, Monsieur, but go and examine it closely."

He halted on the path; and, with a beating heart, Walter approached the tomb alone. It was of pure, white marble. At the head stood a beautifully sculptured cross, and all around bloomed a perfect garden of brilliant and sweet-smelling flowers. On the slab lay a magnificent wreath of white camellias, which partially hid the inscription. Tremblingly and reverently Walter Lascelles raised the flowers, and scalding tears—tears of love for his wife, and of pity for the

unfortunate woman who lay buried at his feet—fell hot and fast on the tomb, as he read the simple words :—

ELLEN BARCLAY,

AGED 22.

“ Her sins are forgiven ; for she loved much.”

THE END.

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